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THE WAR BLIND  
IN AMERICAN SOCIAL  
STRUCTURE





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# THE WAR BLIND IN AMERICAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

BY  
ALAN G. GOWMAN, PH. D.

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## Foreword

Recent development of scientific ideology and methodology has produced a rapid expansion in nearly every field of scientific exploration and endeavor. Old, conventional boundary lines of scientific areas, formerly staked out and jealously guarded, are becoming indistinct, if not completely obliterated. Physics has expanded over into the field of chemistry. Chemistry is busy at work in the field of nuclear physics. Philosophically speaking, in science, a spade is no longer a spade. It is a related, integrated part of the whole deck.

Happily, in accord with this philosophical concept, Dr. Gowman undertook the present study which disregards the conventional distinction separating the field of sociology from the field of psychology. His flexibility permits him with equal facility and skill to play the in-and-out-field. Such versatility is necessary in a study of this nature where the impact of social forces so profoundly affects the self-regarding attitudes of the individual.

Dr. Gowman's sociological training and background have freed him from the old mechanistic concept that the scientific problem lies resident in the individual himself and is somehow mystically inherent in the physical state of blindness. It is a delightful relief to find this study free from the old mechanistic comparisons of the blind and sighted in sensory and perceptual structure, in intellectual content and quotient and in emotional and personality inventories. It can be honestly said that this study has broken through the methodological barrier which has retarded the scientific study of blindness for the past many years, and has opened the way to approach the dynamic functioning not only of blind but of all physically handicapped individuals.

Dr. Gowman has delineated for us the pattern in which the handicapped individual is constantly struggling for his ego-balance in the ever shifting attitudes of those about him where, at one moment, he is intimately defined as one "of us"—the group, and then, in another social context, the next moment, is generically defined as one "of them"—the handicapped. This shifting inconsistency in the attitude of relatives, friends and strangers prevents a confident crystallization of self-identification, thereby impairing a complete acceptance both of the self and of the social relationships in which the person lives. This impairment affects unfavorably the potential ability and function of the individual.

The author, as a sociologist, is capable of taking into consideration the impact of the physical handicap on the social environment, and as a psychologist, is capable of appreciating and interpreting the effects of this impact upon the handicapped individual. His scientific and objective maturity permits him to deal with these phenomena admirably, for he does not stumble into the same emotional pit as do many "of them" who blame the attitudes of the social environment as a cause for their own malfunctioning and lack of opportunity. He accepts the realistic fact that the handicapped individual himself must perceive and understand this interrelational conflict and mature into an adequately functioning individual in spite of it, for this is the constant social factor that will always be present in the life of the handicapped person.

This is a book that should be studied carefully by teachers and social workers who are dealing with the personality structure of handicapped individuals and special attention should be given to Dr. Gowman's functional dynamics by those who are undertaking any research of any nature in the field of the physically handicapped.

*Los Angeles, April 23, 1957*

THOMAS D. CUTSFORTH, PH.D.



# Introductory Approach to Studies in Blindness

## Plan and Problem

Among the uniformities which appear in the literature of blindness, one manifests itself with striking consistency. The blind are socially isolated. While their physical aloneness is notorious, most observers emphasize that the consequent social isolation is far more intensely destructive. In their relationships with others, the blind are, for varying reasons, set apart and barriers arise to effectively block the normal flow of social interaction. These diverse pressures which distort interpersonal relations will be of major concern in the present analysis.

The forces which set the blind apart are countless, but among the most critical are the stereotypes fostered by the larger society and the uncertainty or ignorance surrounding these fixed beliefs. The latter, a sheer lack of knowledge as to how to relate to the blind, is of equal or greater importance than is the hard core of the stereotypical structure. Thus, relationships tend to be awash with uncertainty or marred by stereotypical conceptions which are anchored in the image of the blind beggar. Within the stereotype the prevailing theme is dependent passivity, a definition which may or may not be accepted by the blind themselves. Here the emphasis will fall on those who reject the traditionally sanctioned path of semi-helpless dependence, the blind who insist on a more gratifying way of life. These independent or actively oriented individuals strive to

break out of the stereotypical mold to which the bulk of the visually handicapped are confined. In so doing, they are agents of change, introducing strain into society by upsetting the stable though impoverished balance which is anchored in the stereotypical structure.

In the following chapters, behavior is observed in specified situations and involves the actions of the sighted as well as those of the more actively oriented blind. The analysis is directed as much or more toward representatives of society as it is directed toward the blinded individuals themselves. The blind are seen, then, as they act within a matrix of social attitudes, and the weight and direction of these attitudes is explored.

While the research has important implications for psychological theory, its primary aim is sociological. The intensive search is for patterned behavior among a particular segment of the blind, a segment which has its own unique problems centered in the fight for independence and reciprocal relationships.

### Orientation

The present study is loosely anchored in empirical research. For reasons of space and presentation, however, certain of the empirical sections have been omitted. These omissions tend further to emphasize the descriptive and exploratory character of the approach. In a field to which slight sociological efforts have been applied, a basic goal must be to stake out the various problem areas, and prepare the ground for empirical investigation.

This kind of inclusive exploration was advanced materially through discussion with workers in the field, familiarity with its literature and constant, if unique, observation. A varied set of approaches was found important in areas of research, and formed essential background for those more general relationships which emerge in the theoretical sections.



Justification for the wide ranging character of the work, and its diverse planes of analysis, lies in the increasing recognition given to descriptive studies by social scientists as a context for future research. It is hoped that the use of multiple, rather than narrowly concentrated facets of exploration will enable the selection of critical areas for the formulation of testable hypotheses in a field marked by complication and subtle variation.

The universe of the blind includes many subgroups, ordered by criteria of age, sex, origin of disability, social class and degree of sight remaining. In this discussion, the appropriate reference is to those individuals blinded in war, with the further qualification that they are considered to be more successful or effective societal members than are the mass of blinded individuals. Since this group is a minority within a minority, generalizations resulting from the work must be applied with caution. The blind share their blindness, however, and many of the considerations, appropriately qualified, apply to the wider category of the blind.

### Procedures and Sources

Several empirical studies serve to buttress the more descriptive and theoretical sections of the discussion. A questionnaire administered to high school students elicited a series of responses which effectively portrayed the core societal attitudes and the essential content of the stereotype. Blindness was ranked in relation to other disabilities and explored through a variety of situational problems and agree or disagree questions.

A series of intensive interviews contributed to the sketching in of the subjective response of the war blind to society's impoverished attitudinal set. For this facet of the research, several individuals blinded in World War II were selected. While they were similar in a number of important



respects, a conscious effort was made to encompass a broad range of reactions to the disability. The interviews themselves were conducted on a model which was a variant of the focused interview, and concerned the blinded individual's reaction to the self and to the social setting in which he is placed.

Finally, an experiment in controlled observation which examined the behavior of retail clerks toward blinded and sighted purchasers served to dramatize the interactive consequences of the loss of sight. The experiment highlights the significant part played by the companion as others attempt to engage a uniquely handicapped person. The interest lay in making clear cut distinctions among reciprocity, mediation and exclusion in a purchasing situation.

### Theoretical Considerations

The orientation taken here is decidedly sociological. The focus is upon action and reaction involving two or more individuals. These individuals are viewed as actors holding defined social positions and playing out specified social or occupational roles. The richness of personality is thereby compressed in an effort to highlight normative process. This process is the working out of behavioral expectations which are so deeply ingrained that they are rarely recognized and seldom questioned.

Such an approach allows the researcher to view society as an integrated collectivity rather than as a mere aggregate of unique individuals. The distinctly sociological view implies that conceptualization takes place over against a background of group relationships. These relationships between and among individuals are for the sociologist the hard realities of his craft.

The concept of social role is central to this perspective. Role can be thought of as the dynamic aspect of the indi-

vidual's various statuses or the behavior expected of persons filling these positions. The actor, or role player, in a given situation defines it in much the same manner as does any related other playing out a complementary or reciprocal role. Definite structure is imposed on the role player's behavior both internally, through his acceptance of the role as defined by the larger society, and externally, through the expectations of significant others that his behavior will vary only within a narrowly specified range. Behavior and expectation of behavior, then, tend to merge, making for stability in human relatedness.

However, the stable aspects of role which stress a behavioral symmetry or equilibrium are useful as a contrast rather than as a model for the analysis of those blinded individuals who strive toward dominant societal patterns. For in this instance the attitudes and expectations are not shared and the role is quite differently defined by those who are caught up in the interpersonal transaction. The wider society tends to define the blind role in terms of dependency and fundamental incapacity, while the more actively oriented blind attempt to raise their own role definition to a level of heightened functioning. There is, further, the problem of a very real normative vacuum in which neither party is aware of any well established fabric of expectations.

The process of contrasting the behavior of the blind and the behavior of related others with more routine normative situations will mark the work throughout, lending counterpoint to those deviations which spring directly from the introduction of blindness.

### Acknowledgement of Bias

Perhaps one who is himself blind, engaged in analysis of the blind, is more highly sensitized to the problems of bias or the intrusion of value judgments than are those who



are initially somewhat further removed from their research area. My selection of the blind for analytical purposes has a very obvious character and tends to highlight the host of factors that fall outside the sphere of scientific consideration. A heavy emotional investment is perhaps chief among these forces which, if unacknowledged and unanalyzed, would partially determine both the direction taken and the results obtained. Some awareness of one's own values allows the investigator to be alert to their covert entry into the research product, thus maintaining rational scientific procedure.

The selection of subject material was influenced by the need to promote a general understanding of the blind through the application of social scientific methods. It involved, too, a need for better understanding my own unique position within this group. There was, moreover, an obvious identification with those mobile, successful blind individuals who look toward a more rewarding way of life, and a corresponding lack of sympathy with those blind who play a somewhat less successful role in society.

Predispositions of this sort will, of course, have a varied impact on the research product. In illustration, it will be apparent that a certain range of possible bias was excluded when interviewing those blinded individuals who were considered to be more successful. Identification with them, however, leaves open the possibility of superimposing my own definition of the blinded individual's situation upon this group, attributing to them my own attitudes and beliefs.

The gathering and analysis of data would obviously be distorted if one assumed too readily that each of these persons was as deeply concerned with the sanctity or dignity of the individual, and that each was as willing to renounce the traditional prerogatives of the blind, as is the writer. Such attitudes may well be typical of the blinded individuals to be interviewed, but the degree of typicality can only

be established through an objective analysis of the evidence.

Further, when speaking of the less successful blind, one might falsely assume that they too perceive the conflict imposed by blindness, and erroneously postulate a marked unhappiness in their lot. For them, the social definitions found in their relationships may prove the sturdiest kind of support, and permit a sufficient range of freedom for the expression of self. Here, as elsewhere, these assertions can be established only in the context of empirical research.

An interactive analysis which focuses on the divisive forces in the relationship of blind and sighted opens up further opportunities for the intrusion of bias. There might be a tendency to overemphasize the disruptive elements brought to the situation by sighted individuals, minimizing those elements contributed by the blind. For the condition of blindness entails an intrinsic dependency in a society constructed for the sighted, and the blind often react badly to their disability and to the objective frustrations which make up their world. One must recognize the awkward and helpless nature of the blind person in certain situations, and the fact that he presents an unusual stimulus to uninitiated others, a stimulus which may arouse feelings of threat, conflict and fundamental impotence.

Awareness of the inevitable weightings which will occur, and the understanding of some basis for them, is the end toward which this statement of bias has been included.





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## CHAPTER I

### Background and Orientation

Because vision seems so vital to men, they tend to define the blind in a negative way, to conceive of blindness as the absence of sight. But blindness is more than an index to a residual category. It distinguishes a structured segment of the social fabric, not mere peripheral incapacity nor abnormality, but a distinctly different kind of role than is played by the sighted. The blind lie outside the normal social continuum, so that their difference is one of type rather than degree. Just as the child holds a unique status rather than being classed as an immature adult, so the blind are more than normal people who cannot see. Society assigns them a marginal position, where they function as strangers in an uneasy social limbo. Blindness as a physical disability is overshadowed by the fact that it is also a social handicap. The impairment in its character of decreasing competence, when coupled with the overlay of social attitudes, signifies a basic restriction in the range and depth of human intercourse.

If interaction is restricted or distorted by the presence of a blind individual, it is necessary to analyze the model of normal interaction and to define the variations imposed by blindness. Interaction is usually assumed to be marked by elements of symmetry and stability, to exhibit a basic equilibrium which underlies routine human relatedness. The key to this equilibrating character is found in the systems of mutual expectations which have been built up in the interacting members, so that they can securely anticipate one another's behavior. Each individual typically knows what is expected of him and what can be predicted about the behavior of the other. Thus a certain prior knowledge

of the interactive network, a fund of knowledge which is built in and perhaps seldom consciously recognized, lies at the root of social transactions. The expected behavior is learned, but that learning results from so many years of experience that it has an aura of intrinsic rightness.

The introduction of a blind individual to the interactive context disrupts the mechanisms of routine adaptation. Disruptive elements are of at least two kinds. First, there are the restrictions inseparable from blindness itself, such as lack of eye contact, and the cutting off of whole realms of visually symbolic behavior. Second, and perhaps more critical, are the uncertainties and inadequacies resulting from the participant's differing definitions of the situation. The sighted individual tends to react in terms of a meagre stereotype which fails to fit the range and diversity of actual blind persons. This stereotype, in any concrete instance, may prove inadequate. It is obvious that the expectations or perceptual set which enables one to enjoy casual relations with the pencil seller will not work very well with the university professor.

The stereotype of the blind lacks the rigid structure and full content found in the image of other minority groupings. Its core is surrounded by amorphous or ill-defined areas making for instability in interactive relationships, thus magnifying the dilemma faced by sighted individuals upon confronting the blind. Once the stereotype falters, the sighted person is without any pattern of stable expectations, and his behavior may become bizarre or inappropriate. The blind person in turn, reacts to awkward and stereotyped overtures with marginal behavior of his own, so that the interactive relationship suffers from a double abnormality. The blind role, it must be emphasized, is seen from the start as atypical and unique, since its limitations are so visible and its occurrence so relatively rare.

Those blinded individuals who are the central concern

of this investigation are the ones most highly sensitized to the inadequacies of the interactive process that stems from both the limitations imposed by blindness and the failure of sighted individuals to strive toward a system of reciprocal interaction. For they are themselves oriented to dominant value patterns, and possibly feel the departure from normal or symmetrical relationships more keenly than do other and less active blind. In this situation, both blind and sighted are confronted with a novel learning challenge. It is always problematic whether either or both of them can successfully meet the need for adaptive behavior.

The forces which set the blind apart are various, and their understanding can be advanced significantly by turning to the literature of blindness. Obviously, the literature embodies several divergent orientations, but scattered through it will be found one conception central to the present work. This perspective is most easily communicated through the presentation of a series of relevant quotations. Authored by individuals of diverse backgrounds, the comments exhibit striking uniformity in their approach to the subject of blindness and clearly demonstrate the major orientation to be followed in this text.

Helen Keller has said, "Not blindness, but the attitude of the seeing to the blind is the hardest burden to bear."<sup>1</sup>

All too frequently the great tragedy of a blind person's life is not primarily his blindness but the reactions of the family and social group toward him as a non-typical member.<sup>2</sup>

As Edith Ballinger Price so aptly states, "Our handicapped girl is brought up on three phrases 'Poor little thing' 'How

<sup>1</sup> Phillip S. Platt, "Additional Factors Affecting the Blind", in Paul A. Zahl, *Blindness*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Kathryn E. Maxfield, "The Preschool Blind Child," in Paul A. Zahl, *Blindness*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 82.



wonderful' 'She cannot do anything' which leads to self-pity, self-conceit, and self-distrust."<sup>3</sup>

Blindness, as a mental stress does not appear of itself alone, to be capable of producing abnormal mental or emotional reactions.<sup>4</sup>

Blindness is an inconvenience, said one courageous man without vision. So it is, and one of the greatest from which mortal man can suffer. But to a high-spirited person thus handicapped a greater trial still is the attitude of the world of men toward his deprivation.<sup>5</sup>

We do not want our girl to be a lonely actor on life's stage though she charm the masses with her monologue, nor do we want her to be a solitary spectator of life's drama, though she bring to her observation the wisdom of the ages. We want to see her in the midst of the throng, jostled and bruised perhaps, but triumphant.<sup>6</sup>

Barker has commented, "There are no inherent sources of behavior maladjustment attaching to a disabled body. The sources of the maladjustment lie in the unfavorable social situation within the family or within the larger social group, which an atypical body is likely to create for the person."<sup>7</sup>

The tragic aspect of blindness does not inhere in the condition nor can it do so. In nature it is absent. It is an entirely civilized idea. The world in which a man finds himself creates the tragedy for him and in him. If I found blindness more of a

<sup>3</sup> Bertha Hanford, "Social Adjustment of Girl Graduates of Schools," *Proceedings of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind*, 1927, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard L. Diamond and Alice Ross, "Emotional Adjustment of Newly Blinded Soldiers," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. CII, No. 3, November, 1945, p. 371.

<sup>5</sup> Jessica L. Langworthy, "Blindness in Fiction: A Study of the Attitude of Authors Towards Their Blind Characters," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, June, 1930, p. 271.

<sup>6</sup> Bertha Hanford, "Social Adjustment of Girl Graduates of Schools," *Proceedings of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind*, 1927, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Lee Meyerson, "Somatopsychological Aspects of Blindness," in Wilma Donahue and Donald Dabelstein, *Psychological Diagnosis and Counseling of the Adult Blind*, New York, American Foundation for the Blind, 1950, p. 19.

major nuisance than a tragedy, therefore, it was because of the world in which I moved and had my being.<sup>8</sup>

The blind are the victims of the ignorance of the public concerning their real condition.<sup>9</sup>

The congenitally blind, never having known experientially what vision is, suffer no privation save as it is defined for them in their social relations.<sup>10</sup>

The sighted person who thinks that by closing the eyes for a few moments it is possible to realize something of the significance of blindness has failed to grasp the essential fact that to the blind, blindness is the normal state.

If the significance of this fact is properly appreciated, it will at once be apparent that blindness does not give rise to a pronounced psychological make-up, such idiosyncracies as are frequently associated with that deprivation—hypersensitivity, complexes, eccentric behavior, and so on—could as easily develop in any other subject in similar circumstances. For instance, take a sighted child, isolate it from its kind, or impress upon its mind that it is different, and you will produce in that child precisely the same sort of psychological phenomena as is often found in the blind. It is no exaggeration to say that no trait is peculiar to blindness.<sup>11</sup>

As we study the various items under which replies to child-question number 17 are tabulated, one fact stands out clearly: the social attitudes and condition engendered by the handicap seem to play a far greater role in the creation of frustrations and emotional disturbances in the blind subjects than did the sensory privation itself. Every one of the above statements (which are typical of the entire body of the replies to this question) point to the fact that awareness of the handicap results, not so much from the lack of sight as from the elements

<sup>8</sup> Hector Chevigny, *My Eyes have a Cold Nose*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1946, p. ix.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Villey, *The World of the Blind*, translated by Alys Hallard, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1930, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas D. Cutsforth, *The Blind in School and Society*, New York, American Foundation for the Blind, 1951, p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Copland, "The Psychology of the Blind," *The New Beacon*, The National Institute for the Blind, Vol. XIX, No. 226, October, 1935, pp. 270-272.



in the social situation that blindness creates, such as an excess of sympathy and help, unnecessary attention, or being looked upon as an object of curiosity or pity.<sup>12</sup>

The personality problem of the blind is in many ways comparable with that of the redhead of half a century ago . . . Even now, however, the clinical psychologist still sees individuals bearing the personality scars of a carrot-top childhood—the damage has been done not only to the self-regarding attitudes, but to the social person as well. It is an inescapable observation that while the personality pattern of the socially damaged redhead is consistent with the attitudes of a generation ago, it is also consistent with the personality pattern of most socially frustrated persons. In other words, society with its preconceived attitudes, can induce the neurotic personalities it feels to be inherent in particular groups . . . Without further discussion, the rather dogmatic conclusion must be stated that the disability and incapacitation so commonly found among the blind have their origin not in physical condition but in the impact of the individual upon society and its attitudes.<sup>13</sup>

To be shunned by friends, to be forgotten by former comrades, to be set aside by loved ones, that is poignant affliction. It is bad enough to be shut in, it is far worse to be shut out.

You hear the same story from the blind in every walk of life. A Chinaman in a Salt Lake shop put it cryptically like this, "me no see, me no good." A mechanic speaking of his former companions, said, "Some of them pass me up, and the rest turn me down." A gentleman of culture quoted *Les Misérables* to this effect, "I am like Jean Valjean, I stand outside of life."

It is the same story in three modes of speech. Blindness is not sightlessness, it is a maladjustment with life.

It is segregation from society that gives us a psychology of the blind—it is a psychology, rather, or psychiatry of isolation. The abnormal state of mind comes as an aftermath to blindness.

<sup>12</sup> Vita Stein Sommers, *The Influence of Parental Attitudes and Social Environment on the Personality Development of the Adolescent Blind*, New York, American Foundation for the Blind, 1944, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas D. Cutsforth, "Personality and Social Adjustment Among the Blind," in Paul A. Zahl, *Blindness*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1950, pp. 174-175.



The psychopathic condition is the result of solitary confinement. The Romans called the blind "prisoners of blindness."<sup>14</sup>

He has, in theory at least, permission to take his place in society. But there is that in his situation which still defeats him as a person, and it is not the physical drawback of sightlessness. It is the effect of his sightlessness on the sighted world. There is still an emotional barrier against him, a survival of the times when a silent prayer against catching his affliction was said by sighted men on touching his hand. It is still vaguely more fitting to give a check to a social agency for the blind than to give jobs to its clients . . .<sup>15</sup>

Man's humanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.<sup>16</sup>

There is little need to restate the consensus the authors express, or to re-emphasize the essentially sociological approach of each. While the situation of action within which the blind must operate is of crucial importance, it is, of course, necessary to be aware of the unique reaction of the individual to the matrix of attitudes and to the disability. For in addition to the stream of outer pressures many observers have stressed the intrinsic losses which blindness entails. These would include reduced stimulation or limited control over both the self and the environment. Still other authors emphasize the symbolic losses of blindness and link the disability with primitive emotions regarding male potency or castration anxiety.

It has been observed, moreover, that the individual's own attitudes toward the disability can materially affect the attitudes of others, for if the blind individual is energetic and aggressive, he may succeed in making his personality the point of contact rather than passively allowing the stereotype to hold sway. Primitive anxieties and concep-

<sup>14</sup> Murray B. Allen, "The Social Adjustment of the Newly Blinded," *Proceedings of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind*, 1927, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Hector Chevigny and Sydell Braverman, *The Adjustment of the Blind*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950. p. vii.

<sup>16</sup> Murray B. Allen, *op. cit.* p. 30.

tions of self, although important, are variables of a basically psychological nature. They will be recognized and treated but cannot assume the central position in a study of interactive process.

Attitudes of the public toward the blind subtend a wide arc of opinion and belief. There is, as we have mentioned, a discernible core stereotype, but it is surrounded by an exceedingly wide, amorphous area of free-floating ideas and ill-defined expectations. Blindness is considered to be the worst of all disabilities, so much so that some persons indicate a preference for death over what they imagine as a life of bleak darkness. The reasons for its ranking as such a grave loss are numerous. As suggested earlier, it occurs at what most persons feel is the seat of personality, the region of the face and brain, and thus ruptures the perceived focus of the self. Further, it is relatively easy to imagine blindness, even if the empathic feelings are objectively false, since we have all closed our eyes or stumbled around darkened rooms.

If we place such an intense value on sight, then we also feel that such a loss should be compensated through some infinite justice. Thus there is the fiction of the sixth sense, or the belief that the blind have some unusual compensatory talent such as musical ability or superior faculties for judging character. An attitude of awe and amazement is evidenced toward any achievement of the blind and they are often burdened by liquid expressions of overevaluation.

A polarity exists between the images of the blind beggar and the blind genius, so that the blind individual, initially defined as hopelessly incompetent, is transformed into genius on the basis of a few accomplishments. Thus, no true estimate of the abilities or emotions of the blind seems possible for the sighted, since they are limited to an unrealistic stereotype, or worse, a complete lack of ideas and experience which would allow them to relate to a blind



individual on the basis of his total personality rather than his blindness alone.

Not only is the stereotype a potent factor in blocking opportunities for reciprocal relations, but it tends sharply to distort the blinded individual's definition of self and situation. For these fixed beliefs imply a lag in society's conception of the range of capacity left to a blinded individual and grossly underestimate his social worth. The gulf that exists between the prevailing conceptions of blindness and the blinded individual's self-definition is dramatically emphasized by those war blind who cling tenaciously to earlier modes of behavior. For their efforts are directed toward transcending the more traditional blind role and combatting the overlay of stereotypical beliefs. The drama of the military loss tends to shield these blinded individuals from many of the more crippling features of the disability. Their challenge is primarily one of meeting a novel interpersonal flow. The intensity of their efforts to maintain integrity of personality will become meaningful when set off against the stream of stereotyped pressures which so arbitrarily restrict the full expression of self.

Blindness has deep psychological significance in a sighted world. The eye as a symbol has been linked with several emotionally intense objects and ideas. These would include conscience, the soul, male potency, wholeness and the figure of the mother. Moreover, there are implications in blindness that tend to mobilize guilt. It is as if the sighted person were thinking, "Why should he be blind and not I?" The fear of looking or peeping, and of being punished for seeing too much, is probably also involved. All of these resonances at the unconscious level of meaning exert a powerful force on the sighted person. They seem certain to lead him to a feeling of strangeness and anxiety in his contacts with the blind, and have their consequences in avoidance, revulsion and outright rejection.

Societies tend to resolve the difficulties presented by blindness, and make the interactive strain conventional rather than socially aberrant by placing the blind in a unique category. By pushing them out of the major prestige system in which their evaluator has his own place, the sighted can stifle competition and insure that the actions of blind and sighted will be noncomparable. Thus relegated to a collateral relationship, the blind are safe objects of admiration, condescension, or whatever, presenting no threat to the sighted individual's own status. Evaluation simply occurs on different scales, and the price of this convenience is the splitting of the social world into blind and sighted hemispheres.

What happens when the segments of the world meet, when blind and sighted engage in a social transaction, is the problem of this discussion. The strains in the situation are to be viewed in context, as a contrast to stable interactive systems. The blind will be analyzed against a backdrop of the larger society and explored in their relation to it, not considered as isolated phenomena. The analysis is undertaken not merely to examine the strands of a complex relationship, but to sense the shading and texture of an emotional experience rare in this society.



## CHAPTER II

### Blindness and the Military Setting

Of the many physical disabilities, few are as capable of disturbing the studied rationality of man as is blindness. Evoking in others deep and complex emotions it tends to create impregnable barriers separating those who are blind from the larger society. Judgments based on individual uniqueness, which are often present in the sighted world, give way to overriding stereotypes and effectively block flexible interpersonal processes. Lack of contact with the blind makes understanding especially difficult, since it precludes that knowledge of experience so vital to informed human relationships.

As a disability, blindness ranks at or near the top in prestige value. It is more romantic and less disfiguring than lameness or amputation; it is more serious and far less often the subject of humor than is deafness. Blindness is regarded as very crippling, the most keenly felt of all impairments, and it possesses the highest measure of sob appeal for the larger society. It strikes at elemental levels of human functioning and leaves the individual cruelly disabled. Much of its force rests upon raw psychological reactions and the vivid image it calls forth in the minds of those possessing vision.

These diverse pressures are brought into sharp relief by those who meet with their blindness in accident or war since the various forces which play upon all of the blind are exaggerated and perhaps more keenly experienced when the injury is freshly imposed. It may be valuable, therefore, to first analyze the general condition of the blind through a description of the gains and losses accruing to a newly blinded individual. The gain-loss balance will be further

clarified by a discussion of blindness in a concrete military setting.

Approaching the disability as a network of positive and negative factors, it is possible to delineate the balance sheet of the blind in a fashion similar to that employed by Dollard in his investigation of Negro-white relations.<sup>1</sup> For any status, including that of slave, has, as Dollard maintains, its own set of deprivations and compensations. The gain-loss model affords a novel perspective on blindness which, like most handicaps, has seldom been recognized as entailing privileges as well as limitations. The gains and losses to be set forth here do not fit any perfect scheme of logical classification. They tend to overlap and fuse as one examines their various aspects, just as they shift or merge in the life space of any particular blind individual.

The losses suffered by the blind may be grouped under three major categories: contraction of the experiential field; ambiguities and devaluations of status; and decreased control over the self and environment.<sup>2</sup>

Contraction of the experiential field is the most obvious limitation of the blind, and one that is largely intrinsic in character. Regardless of the attitudes of the sighted or the level of role performance, there are certain barriers which are by their nature inseparable from blindness. Perception and orientation and the appreciation of many phases of life are seriously cut off. The absence of visual contact implies that interaction at its most elementary levels must be drastically altered. Forms of recreation which are becoming

<sup>1</sup> John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, New York, Harper & Bros., 1949.

<sup>2</sup> The losses here described were in large part culled from the entire body of literature used. However, the analysis of loss rests heavily upon an unpublished manuscript, *Blindness—A Multiple Handicap*, by the Rev. Thomas Carroll, Catholic Guild for the Blind, Boston, Massachusetts, and the analysis of loss by Berthold Lowenfeld in "A Psychological Approach to Blindness," *Journal of Exceptional Children*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, October, 1949, pp. 1-6 and 19.



increasingly important in American society, with its phenomenon of abundant leisure, are sharply curtailed. Active team sports, for instance, are either difficult or impossible for the blind, since here bodily movement is necessarily ordered through sight. Reading must be confined to auditory experience and the braille method, both of which are slower and less likely to cover the range of current art or information. The scraps of interesting ideas and events which come to the sighted person through skim reading of magazines or newspapers, and which form the topical fund of much light conversation, are largely beyond the blind person's reach. The barriers thrown up against reading and watching are, moreover, crucial factors which restrict the opportunity for intellectual growth.

There is a sensory narrowing of the individual's responses to basic stimuli. Sex, food and beauty, whose impact stems from the combination of several cues, are all less intensely perceived by the blind. In general, the life of the senses, especially in the realm of rich instinctual release, is diluted and foreshortened by the missing sense.

Experience, for the blind, must be constructed of fewer building blocks. Since stimulation takes more narrowly channeled forms than it does with the sighted, there is a lessening of the potentiality for combinations and permutations of stimuli. The resulting impoverished perceptual field may inhibit creativity and compress the natural fullness of the real world. Ideas and images alike may grow angular, lacking the shading and roundness of full maturity. Since fewer signposts are available, the blind person misses many events on the most prosaic level. He no longer notes the intrusion of billboards or senses the changed profile of an aging friend.

In a fundamental way, the range of action is collapsed. This leaves the blind individual, in virtually any situation, with fewer alternative choices of behavior. His narrower



world, while it may be conducive to psychic ease and simplicity, represents a confining environment which is duplicated on other levels than that of strictly sensory experience.

The blind person's devaluation in social status has several roots, of which one of the most important is the assumed inability to play a fully independent role in the sphere of economic competition. The blind tend to be viewed as public charges, and economic self-sufficiency is regarded as unusual. Blindness does impose real difficulties in finding an occupational niche. As sensory experience is limited, so the number and kind of jobs of which the blind are capable becomes some fraction of the sighted occupational universe. An engineer setting up any kind of factory job, for instance, assumes the performance capabilities of a sighted person. Even tasks that could conceivably be done without seeing are normally geared to visual cues. The occupational loss, however, stems far more from erroneous conceptions of a blind individual's capabilities than it does from the intrinsic losses involved in blindness.

It is difficult for the sighted to assign status and roles to the blind without using blindness as the first criterion of description. Thus there is an ambiguity in all blind statuses, so that the fact of blindness and the fact of social position are inextricably entangled. This means that whatever achievements the blind individual erects will always be viewed in a framework of ascribed blindness. There is the further assumption that blindness involves incompetence, so that real achievements stimulate amazement rather than a realistic evaluation of performance. The status of the blind, then, is always special and connotes strangeness. The individual faces devaluation and overevaluation or some odd mixture of the two, but seldom receives the routine acceptance which characterizes a secure social anchorage.

The special aspect of blind status also involves various other distortions in the individual's network of human rela-

tionships. The blind may undergo the most acute form of segregation and be almost wholly cut off from others in society. More commonly, however, their segregation is symbolized by the inability of the blind individual to merge with a crowd of people, and has its gravest consequences in exclusion from occupational, recreational and other systems. Segregation is also apparent in the conversational shifts which occur when the blind person enters a casual group. It is as though he were a stranger from another country who must only be spoken to in select terms.

Full status in our society rests in part on the individual's possession of all normal capacities. With reference to the body, we tend not only to equate good looks with virtue but also to stress youth and beauty, an attitude which has often meant that all should ideally strive toward some norm of athletic, sun-tanned physique. Since the blind person is not in full possession of his physical faculties, his integrity is shaken, for his body symbolism is incomplete. His self-evaluation and the evaluation of others is often hinged to beliefs which are deeply rooted in Western culture. Many of these beliefs have the force of moral doctrine as in the Old Testament where physical punishment and sin are closely interwoven.

In later writings, however, physical distortion was regarded as mortification or purification, as God set forth trials rather than sending forth inflictions. The two strands remain tangled in the minds of men and the response accorded the blind often vacillates between these two themes. Thus, the blind may be met by ill-concealed rejection and depreciation, or pitied as one who carries a heavy burden down stony paths. As members of society the blind themselves may view their loss in a similar way and from these same perspectives. The tragedy is pressed in upon them from all sides, by both the self and the other.

When combined these dual pressures must inevitably



work to lower the individual's self-esteem. If the body proves to be an area of insufficiency, then self-esteem, the symbol and seat of loss, decreases. In decreasing, it serves to reinforce societal nonacceptance, for one's own status and role depend in some measure upon one's own view of the self. Status is both lost and confused, lost for the person who passively accepts society's dictum of incompetence, confused for the one who is oriented toward achievement or who embraces a more active pattern.

The blind person's control of his environment must always be less than adequate because the world is arranged for the sighted. Since no individual can operate in a vacuum, environmental control and self-control are intimately related. The self in a context of physical and social objects must be able to achieve a working relationship with these objects, but blindness is a gulf which inevitably influences this interplay. Blindness both adds and subtracts dimensions from the individual's connection to the world about him. It adds those cumbersome expedients which serve to facilitate relations like the cane, the companion, the reader and the groping touch, while it subtracts the direct visual channel for which all these are clumsy substitutes.

The blind individual is forced into some measure of dependency, regardless of how vigorous or competent he may be. Dependency, in turn, has negative implications for his social status and his conception of self. It is the direct result of decreased control, for it occurs primarily in those areas where control is impossible or existence dangerous without the mediation of a sighted helper. In its simplest guise, the lack of environmental mastery may be illustrated by the barriers to concrete physical mobility. Navigation of streets, hallways and rooms is hesitant and slow unless the individual is accustomed to the setting.

Hazardous as the physical context may be, its perils vanish when compared with the social environment. Here the



blind person lacks control because he can never be sure what anyone else is doing. In the case of an economic transaction, of course, there are certain moral qualms about cheating the blind, but a more devastating social cheating which the blind endure seldom invites sanctions. This is perhaps because no one would define as a stolen article the multitude of glances, expressions and gestures which lubricate interaction among the sighted. Yet the blind are deprived of cues by the dozen, and face thereby a severe disadvantage in all their dealings with others. At parties the blind must depend on sighted friends to steer them from group to group, replenish their glass and aid them in the process of disengaging the overhelpful boor. They can be, and often are, quite isolated in a roomful of people. On the street the blind can be easily avoided. This too implies lack of control, for a vital element in social intercourse is the initiation of action. The blind are seldom able to originate a conversation, but must wait to be engaged by someone who seeks them out.

Communication is geared to many levels, symbols and cues. Direct physical contact, where communication rests on tactile sensation alone, is relatively rare. The area is heavily tabooed and closely bounded. Thus the blind are left with the single channel of hearing for the reception of social stimuli. Their communication with others is narrowed in range, and this means they lack the facilities for control which the sighted possess. Moreover, eyes are popularly favored as a clue to character, and many interviewers stress the importance of eye contact in maintaining a close rapport with the respondent. Leverage for the blind is restricted to the use of the voice. It is obviously weaker than the voice-eye combination commonly experienced in direct social contact.

Decreased perception or the lowering of control affects the individual's security system, for at any time, without

the accustomed warning, environmental threats may present themselves. More important, there is often a general state of tension which derives from the lack of situational cues and from the failure of the blind to apprehend what is actively going on about them. Social uneasiness may characterize the most casual encounters, as relationships are approached on a trial and error basis. There exists in the blind as well as in those who engage them an unusual degree of strain and anxiety which accompanies the effort of social adaptation. Even the routines of daily living are not so routine to the blind, who must expend extra energy on dressing, shaving, eating and other simple activities.

The spectator self, which measures one's own achievements, cannot but be chagrined at the lack of capacity for effective control. A decline in self-regard and an implicit shaking of the coherence of personality organization are natural results. Many of the losses, especially those in the area of dependence or control, are related to the incapacity of the sighted to identify with the blind. Only a few individuals seem to have the interest or opportunity to imaginatively place themselves in the role of the disabled other and to gradually achieve a sensitive and meaningful human relationship. Deep understanding on the part of sighted individuals, when it does occur, enhances the feeling of control by insuring an adequate basis for communication, and making the interactive process less artificial.

But the blind also reap gains from their disability. These gains, like the losses, will be analyzed with reference to the societal model of normalcy. They are, of course, not uniform in their impact on the heterogeneous blind population, and their effects will vary sharply from one blind individual to another. Gains may be grouped under the categories of permissiveness, supportive behavior, and variant definitions of the situation by the self and others.

Permissiveness is perhaps most strikingly exemplified by



the tolerance shown the blind in the expression of aggression and the indulgence of idiosyncratic behavior. People seldom counter aggression or remark on unique behavioral manifestations, since they can always attribute these actions to the handicap of blindness. They are ready to see such things as characteristic of the blind, as the inevitable accompaniments of a variant role, rather than to attribute them to the willful aims of the individual. A selfishness of orientation is often condoned, for it is believed that the blind individual's disability makes it natural, and at times imperative, for him to focus on his own interests to the exclusion of altruistic goals which are rightfully the province of persons who are more fortunately endowed. One gives from his abundance, while by definition the blind man functions from a level of scarce resources.

The blind are usually allowed to escape from certain of the routine petty duties of the daily round of living. In a group of sighted people it is unlikely that a blind individual will be asked to run errands, move furniture, dry dishes, or do similar tasks. Although this is a double-edged exclusion, in that it reduces the blind individual's sense of participation, it does afford some relief from irritating activities.

Permissiveness extends to the kinds of privilege given the blind in group leadership. Very often, provided he has not been bypassed entirely, the blind individual will be given the center of the stage and allowed to dominate the discussion. Dominance can also be exerted in some forms of communication, especially in the dyadic relationship, because the strangeness of the blind allows them to steer the sighted. Their influence is increased because it carries the double force of the personality plus the unique status of blindness.

Supportive behavior toward the blind stems primarily from the general humanitarian orientation found in American culture. Although the ideal of the Samaritan is not everywhere translated into action, the themes of charity and



helpfulness are important features of this society. The fact that ours is an economy of abundance contributes to the notable American willingness to give, and some would maintain that the frontier tradition of cooperation acts as a strong counterpoint to economic competitiveness. At any rate, the disabled can count today on a reservoir of sympathetic good will.

The blind receive preferential treatment in several ways. In the occupational world, for instance, there are a few kinds of jobs where the blind can count on favored status. Examples are positions in work with the blind, and the concessions granted to blind entrepreneurs in government buildings. The blind newsdealers and tobacconists in Washington bureaus have a clear field, with sighted competitors excluded. Additionally, the war blind find economic security in liberal disability compensations and have extensive educational opportunities under Public Law 16. The disability compensation takes some of the meanness out of blindness and opens the way to real achievement in the occupational sphere.

Preferential gestures and extra courtesy are often extended to the blind in public places. They may be given the last seat on the bus, or the restaurant manager may give their service his personal attention. Such particularistic treatment by the larger society clears the path for expression of the blinded individual's unique needs and desires, quite apart from his blindness. The attitude of awe and admiration which the blind sometimes meet also serves to bolster their status. A blind individual has the qualified distinction of being both more and less than a man. He is a man plus his strangeness, courage, distinguished achievement. He is a man minus his sight and independence.

Above all, perhaps, his dependency is tolerated and unfortunately in some cases encouraged. Americans put a premium on self-sufficiency, on not owing anything to any-

one, yet they accept the dependency of the blind, and for certain blind individuals this is the sturdiest form of security. The person who wants to be taken care of, to lean on strong, parental figures, is not a rare instance in the experience of psychiatrists and social workers. The blind, however, can legitimately indulge their dependency needs, without having others admonish them to "grow up" or "stand on your own feet."

The variant definitions of the situation by the self and others imply that there is a special realm of freedom for the blind. The ambiguity as to what may be expected of a blind person entails a large residual zone where he may act as he pleases without upsetting prior expectations. For instance, he may vary his exhibition of ability, pretending incapacity at times when he merely feels lazy. In achievement areas, the lack of definition means that failure will seldom be condemned, while success is rewarded very highly. One is never sure how difficult a particular feat may be for a blind person, and since he is not telling, the general tendency is to overrate his efforts. The blind individual's impact in communication also rests to some extent on these varying and amorphous expectations. Others may concentrate on what he says, and attribute to his words an importance corresponding to their own extra attentiveness.

Further, the blind are able to construct a definition of their personal situation which involves certain advantages. They can work with concentrated force, since they are less subject to the distraction of alternative stimulation. Moreover, some of the clumsy alternatives to sight can be transformed from a loss into a gain. The scheduling of readers, for instance, implies that the blind student is forced into a position of sustained and consistent effort. In a sense, he is offered the challenge of the tortoise and the hare. If he is capable of accepting this challenge, the marathon has already been won, and he will far outstrip many or most



of his sighted competitors. This can be seen again and again in the high academic standings achieved by most blind individuals or in the high production rates attained in the industrial world by blind workers.

Yet another gain might be termed forced social consciousness, and perhaps it is most intensely felt by those who encounter their blindness in early adulthood. Many individuals live out their entire lives so locked into prevailing cultural patterns that they have little awareness of either the self or the social world which surrounds them. While the education is harsh, blindness lends perspective to one's life and permits a consciousness which may be both sensitive and intense. Perhaps one tangible manifestation of this new relationship to both the self and the other is the concern the blind often show for various other minority groupings within the society.

In their social relationships the blind can employ the handicap as weapon or shield. They can refuse to be drawn into unenticing social situations, because their disability is ample justification for a kind of social abstinence. They may not develop a sixth sense, but a facility in using their normal sense which widens the range of experience so arbitrarily compressed by blindness. They may even redefine their oddly deprecatory social reception in a manner which forces sighted individuals into viewing their own actions as gauche or foolish. While finally, from a psychopathological standpoint, blindness may serve as an adequate symptom formation, obviating the need for other expressions of neurotic conflict.<sup>3</sup>

The losses and gains of blindness are composed of dual elements. Some of them, such as the narrowing of the ex-

<sup>3</sup> The potentiality of gains from blindness on the psychological level was seen clearly by Thomas D. Cutsforth. The insights contained within his work contribute much to an essentially sociological analysis of the disability. Thomas D. Cutsforth, "Blindness as an Adequate Expression of Anxiety," *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind*, 1939, pp. 113-115.



periential field, are closely tied to the inability to see. These intrinsic components demand of the sighted individual a basic learning process so that he grows to apprehend the factual limitations of blindness. Others, such as the social awkwardness in conversation, call instead for a relearning by the sighted of their normal responses, only oriented to include the blind in a natural manner. We might conceive of a range extending from those gains and losses which are intrinsic to blindness to those which rest almost entirely on societal attitudes, stereotypes and ambiguities. Most of the gains and losses would then be seen as constituted of varying degrees of the intrinsic and socially structured components.

Nearly all of these advantages and disadvantages have a differential impact on unique individuals. Any two blind persons, for instance, might have entirely different reactions to the deprivations and difficulties involved in daily routine. Idiosyncratic factors such as level of coordination and memory account for much of the variance in the subjective effect of the disability.

In another sense, the gains and losses can reverse themselves according to the level of role played, the associated values and the intensity of the status increment or decrement offered by blindness. The impulse release afforded by society's tolerance of aggression, for instance, is a gain which the actively striving, dominant value oriented blind cannot accept. For if they demand this right, then they must remain on the periphery of interaction. Just as Dollard found in Southern Town, roles involve rights and obligations, so that the acceptance of the right to express aggression freely demands renunciation of more inhibited higher level statuses.<sup>4</sup>

One role which the blind commonly play is that of an accepting passivity; conformity with a fairly dependent and

<sup>4</sup> John Dollard, *op. cit.*

inactive mode of behavior. These individuals make of their handicap a whole way of life, relying on the very fact of blindness to earn a living, and orient their total behavior toward fulfillment of this restricted role. In less extreme form, one finds the blind who merely swim with the tide, perhaps achieving some limited goals, but characterized by the title of a blind schoolteacher's poem "Resignation Triumphant." These passive orientations represent a triumph for society as well as for the individual since, from the point of view of the social system, it means that the variant minority are being held in a safe, devalued category. In their resignation, they do not challenge the sighted norms or demand a place of equality in the larger society.

Still other blind persons look toward a higher level of role performance and attempt to fashion their attitudes and behavior in a manner which closely conforms to dominant societal values. They move against expectations commonly associated with their status and seek a higher level of integration. For these individuals the gain of dependence is really a loss since they are not content to play a passive role but insist on full reciprocity in their social relationships.

The framework of gains and losses which have been qualified above by consideration of differential impact, reversal and the continuum from intrinsic to social characteristics, must be further qualified with reference to the point in time at which a gain or loss occurs. For as the individual's competence increases, bringing new areas under control, those gestures which would formerly have been considered helpful become overhelpful, and thus the meaning of a given act for the developing individual will be altered in time. Helpfulness, if it is minimal and appropriate to the situation, is clearly a gain. Yet when the helping hand goes beyond a certain point, when aid is overdone, the blind person may feel the inferiority and resentment which signifies a decided loss.



The next major focus for discussion will be the situation of the war blinded, who have a common age range and common origin of disability. It will be seen that the situation of action, in this case invested with the added emotional ground-swell of wartime, is a potent variable in defining the role behavior of both the blind and sighted. The discussion will be concentrated on the process of rehabilitation and its aftermath, in the hope that an analysis of the process may provide insight into the genesis of the role of the war blinded.

It is perhaps most valuable to speak of the meaning of blindness in an effort to describe the psychological correlates of the loss of sight. These correlates are far from uniform, for blindness carries different meanings according to its mode of origin and the degree of visual loss. If a person has been blinded as a result of direct enemy action, he has a solid reason for his disability. His blindness, after all, occurred in a necessary and honorable cause.<sup>5</sup>

Since his disability was met with in action, acceptance of it is made easier through both a deep understanding of the inherent dangers within the situation, and a low-keyed fatalism characteristic of combat soldiers. He has become prey to understandable environmental forces. On the other hand, blindness which results from accident has a capricious character. There is no good reason for the disability; it is somehow lacking in cosmic legitimation, and thus may stimulate more bitterness than one finds in combat casualties.

The totally blinded make an easier and more rapid adjustment than the partially blinded since the situation of the former is more clear-cut. The totally blind person is forced to accept his condition, to face the limitations it imposes, while those who have some measure of remaining vision

<sup>5</sup> Bernard L. Diamond and Alice Ross, "Emotional Adjustment of Newly Blinded Soldiers," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. CII, No. 3, November, 1945, pp. 367-371.



may refuse to take up the blind role and grasp at the possibility of escape through the regaining of sight.

To the blind, as to the sighted, the eyes are a symbol of potency and their loss may arouse severe castration anxiety. When combined with extensive body mutilation, as blindness so often is, the loss of sight may come to represent what has been felt to be the greatest loss of all, for it strikes at the integrity of the individual's physical being. The loss of wholeness with its implied decrease in manhood may lead the newly blinded into an unusual expression of sexual activity. Wittkower and Davenport observe that, "staff and blinded men alike agree that at least during their period of training blind men are often unusually aggressive sexually."<sup>6</sup> As if to prove to themselves and others that they retain the essential capabilities of manliness, they may strive for sexual union as a way of being made whole again. Compulsive masculinity may help in the reintegration of the shattered ego, especially insofar as it shores up the virility of the ego-ideal. For the ego and the body are intimately conjoined, and a loss of part of the latter is almost certain to involve reorganization of the former.

Although many psychological disturbances may result from blindness, there is no single syndrome which can be labelled as the neurosis of the blind. One of the striking things about rehabilitation centers for the blinded in World War II, was the small number of men who required or asked for actual psychotherapy. Expert opinion indicates that blindness itself does not predispose individuals to behavior disorders. Yet the readjustment period in the freshly blinded does entail a very strong element of regression. The forced dependency of the blind is, of course, accentuated during the time when one is learning to be blind and re-

<sup>6</sup> E. Wittkower and R. C. Davenport, "The War Blinded: Their Emotional, Social, and Occupational Situation," *Psychosomatic Medicine*, Vol. VIII., No. 2, March-April, 1946, p. 125.

acquiring the techniques of routine living. Illness always implies regression, but it is doubly striking in the blind since they realize that, unlike most ill persons, they can never achieve full recovery.

In the reconstitution of the blinded individual, as he progresses from the stage of virtually total dependency to the state of competent self-sufficiency, we may see the socialization process in microcosm. Like the child, the blind man must learn to operate effectively on an adult level and must be oriented to the major areas of the world about him.

During the early period, the activity of the blind makes up a primitive undifferentiated social role. The individual is defined by his disability, as indeed he will always be to some extent, but here blindness is the sole criterion for behavior and group membership. Such a primitive role level, the war blinded, has been institutionalized in some more militaristic societies. In earlier periods of Japanese history, the wounded ex-warrior was distinguished by the wearing of a white costume.<sup>7</sup> There are some weak trends in this direction in the United States, as seen in the symbol of the white cane and the efforts of certain veterans' organizations to prolong and emphasize ex-military status, but the phenomenon is insulated and seems unlikely to have real effect. The war blind of concern here, look toward a higher level of role adjustment, that of social integration in conformity with dominant American values, rather than negatively looking toward a past role, that of wounded American soldier.

The scene of these first steps back toward complex role behavior is the hospital ward. The character of one particular ward will be discussed, bearing in mind that variations probably exist in the organization and atmosphere from ward to ward. This specific ward was a unit of the Valley

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1946.



Forge General Hospital, and staff and patients were military personnel of the United States Army.

Ward I, whose number may or may not have significance, was the last ward in a long hospital corridor and upon the author's entry held some forty blinded individuals. Because of the unusual character of blindness, the ward became a showcase for visiting generals and civilian dignitaries. Its physical aspects were similar to those of most military hospitals, but there were two distinctive symbols. One of these was the cane hooked to each bed while the other was a long rubber mat marking the aisle between beds. The rubber mat served as a guide for the blinded patients who could run their canes along the edge of it when walking. It is interesting that the mat itself became a sign of the sub-cultural definition of the situation. To visitors the mat had no special significance; rather, it was seen as a part of the general furnishings. To the men in the ward, however, it was a vital landmark and they would reprove visitors who blocked the way by unconsciously standing or lingering upon it. Newcomers had to learn quickly that this was not a decoration but an important symbol of convenience and security. Here, then, is an illustration in this small context of the relearning demanded of the sighted in their contact with the blind. The learning and relearning having crucial significance, however, has a more interpersonal character than does the illustration presented above.

The second distinctive symbol found in the ward was the cane, the primary device used in travel. The ability to walk or navigate the ever widening environment successfully and alone is prominent in the continuum of resocialization as it is in the socialization of the child. For the blind this is accomplished through cane technique. The cane may be held either diagonally across the body with its tip in front of the left foot and slightly off the floor; or at a slight angle in front of and parallel to the body and run lightly along mat,



wall or abutment; or it may be held more toward the center of the body and its tip swung in a semi-circle in front of the individual, in a manner coinciding with the individual's pace. The tip of the cane would be in front of the left foot when the left foot was back, and in front of the right foot when the right foot was back. The cane, then, would have probed the area prior to the next stride.

The cane served latent functions for the individual as well as its manifest function of aiding the navigation process for it offered an extension of physical power, enhancing the security system at its deepest levels. Additionally, it might serve both as an attractive accessory and as a means of coloring verbal expression when pounded for emphasis or quietly tapped for impatience. The cane allowed the individual to assume a new range of bodily postures and gave the hands, often restless adjuncts, some "raison d'être" in unstructured social situations. In travel, a sharp rapping of the cane on corridor floor or door jamb lent support to the individual, insofar as it heralded his approach. Moreover, such behavior may have pandered to exhibitionistic tendencies or served as protective coloration in a varied range of social encounters. Thus, the cane became a mark of identification, labelling status and role, in its capacity to heighten the social visibility of the blind.

The blinded soldier as he confidently traversed the many hospital corridors leading to E.N.T. Ward, P.X., and gymnasium, would encounter knots of other disabled patients conversing in the hallways. Wheelchairs would creak, canes and crutches would move swiftly, and a path would be broken through the wounded to make way for the blinded individual. In the country of the disabled the blind man is king. His disability evoked attitudes of awe and admiration among patients who were themselves badly crippled. Their own physical injuries undoubtedly seemed less severe, less damaging when seen against the specter of blindness.

The staff personnel of the ward were varied in status, sex and age. At the head of the system was a ward officer, a doctor who specialized in ophthalmology. Like other medical officers, he was considerably closer to the role of physician than to the role of military leader. His duties ranged from executive matters to actual medical practice. He had to fill a more diffuse position than medical specialists ordinarily do, performing many of the functions of a general practitioner. For instance, it was the ward officer who often had the responsibility of telling a patient the harsh fact that his sight was irretrievably lost.

A head nurse took over some of the administrative duties of the ward officer. In doing so she expanded her area of control and increased her prestige which was already fairly high in relation to other nurses. Service within this ward obviously carried a certain heightened status similar to that possessed by surgical nurses in civilian hospitals. The head nurse enjoyed much latitude and took advantage of this flexibility to play a diffuse role. She was able to indulge in emotionally toned behavior, to exert her personality and own value structure in many directions. The staff nurses subordinate to her tended to be more neutral and formal, but at the third level the student nurses again brought emotionally colored responses and joking relationships into high relief.

The cadet nurses were customarily found in the treatment room each morning, where they offered minor medical attention to patients seated in the chairs interspersed among hospital equipment. The room accommodated seven to nine patients and the brief medical care, usually the application of hot pads to eye or socket, allowed for the continuous flow of patients entering and leaving. The room took on a diner-like atmosphere with the nurses playing the role of short order cook, as they heated and reheated the cotton compresses. Conversation, too, had a diner-like char-



acter as it ran the gamut of hangover, baseball and sex, varying from the conventional pattern only insofar as recent surgery and medical status were spasmodically interwoven. The student nurses returned in coin the variety of comments playfully offered and the combination of forces, both physical and psychological, resulted in a large grouping of the blind, rarely seen in other sections of the ward.

Perhaps most closely related to the patients were the orientation officers and men who acted directly as guides in the process of re-education. These men were assigned the explicit task of introducing the blind to effective techniques of living with their handicap. They led the patients toward mastery of navigation, the forms of walking and bodily control for most efficient mobility. From simple acts, such as shaving, to more complex organizations of activity, the blind moved through a series of stages. Recreation, for instance, ranged from walking and swimming to riding and golf. Through the various facets of the rehabilitation program the blinded soldiers gained knowledge of what could and what could not be accomplished. Outline was given to their social ground and unknown resources were brought into play. Psychological confidence undoubtedly accrued through the mastery of complicated motor coordination as well as through the mastery of the routines of daily living. Running through all these activities was a prevailing theme of friendship relations. In a small group, scaling formidable barriers of learning and adjustment, interaction was patterned in terms of personalized, highly emotional ties.

The relations of blinded patients to one another ranged from very close to very distant. The ward was extremely heterogeneous and democratic, even extending to the inclusion of the enemy. One German prisoner of war who had been accidentally blinded during his imprisonment became a ward occupant. Despite the small number of men, and the many social activities to which they had access, in-



teraction did not seem to produce full clique relationships. There were some pair formations but these seldom extended into crystallized groups. Blindness, in some ways, appeared to increase the individuality of the patients. Part of the reason for the absence of solid cliques lies in the difficulty the blind have in traveling together. Multiple blind persons increase and confuse the already complicated problem of physical mobility. Further, the lack of eye contact removed one of the stepping stones to casual relationships. An interesting research problem might be the comparison of sociometric patterns in blinded and sighted wards in a search for differential uniformities of interaction.

Many aspects of ward social structure might be explored, such as the formal organization, interactive patterns and use of unique symbolism. But the focus here will be on what has been termed gallows humor as one revealing facet of the total situation, a facet which may serve as a clue to the pervasive psychological atmosphere of the ward. Gallows humor may be defined as a form of humor which is indigenous to stress situations, and serves primarily to relieve the tensions felt in an environment of oppressive reality. It is typical of prisons, concentration camps, hospitals and occupied populations.<sup>8</sup> As product of a group it constitutes an index of spirit or cohesiveness. As agent it acts as a mechanism of strain reduction and an outlet for aggression. Gallows humor ordinarily marks a situation of structured strain, especially when that strain is defined by the group as unjust in some sense. Both the blind and occupied peoples can often fairly view their problem as unjustly imposed. The distinctly sociological nature of this mechanism is clearly seen in the fact that it changes form according to the situations and groups involved. It seems to be bound

<sup>8</sup> Antonin J. Oberdlik, "'Gallows Humor,' A Sociological Phenomenon," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLVII, March, 1942, pp. 709-716. Oberdlik's incisive analysis has provided a framework for much of the present discussion.

by time and place, not only as to form but as to the degree of humor perceived. The best jokes often lose much of their impact when presented in later years in a different place.

In its compensatory aspects, gallows humor reduces strain by transforming the tragic into the ridiculous, as illustrated in the low-level comments of the blatant stage:

“Why don’t you look where you’re going?”

“Don’t let your blindness be a handicap to you.”

“Man coming through on a new cane.”

“I don’t mind being led into temptation; just don’t lead me into a door jamb.”<sup>9</sup>

Expressions such as these undoubtedly serve to cloak feelings of inadequacy or a pervading sense of loss. Anglo-Saxon societies tend to favor suppression or repression of emotion, and little institutionalized expression of grief is permitted. Some other societies offer the individual a more clearly defined framework in which he can siphon off elemental emotional needs. Our society does not facilitate the expression of grief reactions, rather, we tend to give formal, emotionally neutral support, as in the disability compensation. The hospital ward at least partially reflected this prevailing cultural atmosphere for it blocked prolonged emotional outflows and drew the individual into a circle of ever-widening activities. There is, then, a whistling-in-the-dark quality of gallows humor which partially fills the void left by blindness.

As a mode of social control, this joking pattern may be used to coerce in-group members or to intimidate outsiders. In-group coercion seems relatively rare among the blind,

<sup>9</sup> Most of the humor related here was generously offered by C. W. Bledsoe, who was an orientation man in the author’s ward for a long period.



who seldom direct aggression at one another. The partially seeing, however, come under more fire since all too often they manage to scrape the best from both the sighted and the blind worlds. Their remaining sight permits an increase in capacity and when invidious comparisons are drawn the totally blind are at a marked disadvantage.

But the real fund of aggression was reserved for the sighted. Strangers in a blind ward did not know how to act, and the blind often taught through directing cynical barbs at them. Moreover, members of the hospital staff were battered by a variety of comments which tended to define and solidify relationships. It is also possible that some of these indicated a desire to aggress against staff members as a kind of counteraction to the dependency feelings aroused by the staff's close attendance. In illustration, a patient returning from the E. N. T. ward remarked, "Major Johnson! That ragged idiot; I just saw him, and the only thing that kept him from getting further in my nose was his armpits!" There is an obvious decline in the doctor's charismatic qualities in this situation, a refusal to place him on a pedestal. Again, an orientation man said, "Jesus, aren't you cheerful today," to which the blinded patient replied sarcastically, "I've got to be, I'm afraid of mercy killers."

A veteran who was blind, nearly deaf, and had lost an arm, used his physical disintegration as a peg for his humor, which again was directed mainly at the staff and the military hierarchy. One day he asked a staff member to remove his upper plate. Responding to the total picture and perceiving the patient as a wreck or wholly damaged figure, the orientation man washed his hands carefully and proceeded to pull on the soldier's upper teeth. At this the patient gave himself up to euphoric amusement. It turned out, of course, that his teeth were intact, being among his parts that had not been damaged in battle. On another occasion the same individual asked to be left in the center of the



ring during horseback riding. He claimed he was going to review the troops and could see and hear as much as most generals could.

The themes of normalcy, ease and a certain toughness are probably apparent from these anecdotes. The psychological atmosphere of the ward was warm and boistrous. It was a kind of slap-dash Dickensian world, varying only in that a major fraction of staff and patients alike had a nice sense of the ridiculous. Everyone other than the staff, of course, was blind, and up to this point had been insulated from any but the most supportive contact with the larger society. Success is a heavy elixir and the blind were learning rapidly, overcoming new barriers every few days. They achieved such things as dressing themselves and eating neatly in a short period as contrasted with the years a child must spend to accomplish the same feats. They were constantly supported by praise, parties and friendly visitors. The ward was rich in human interplay and emotionally labile.

It may be observed that gallows humor goes through phases, from the crude remarks quoted initially above to the more subtle and defiant tone used with the staff. Aggression against the gushing sympathy and oversupport of the larger society is contained in the following interchange, which may illustrate a still later phase of development. A visitor uninitiated to the prevailing ward atmosphere remarked, "Son, do you mind if I cry for you?" The soldier's reply to this was, "No Ma'am, not if you do it on the other side of the room." This response indicates that the soldier is still relatively unsocialized. Like a child, he expresses his resentment directly, not having learned to take the role of the uninitiated, sighted other.

The discussion will now shift to a consideration of how resocialization of the war blinded is achieved in the ward setting. The reassimilation of the blinded soldier into so-

ciety may be analyzed as a three-stage process. The individual holds the successive positions of blinded soldier, blinded veteran and blind man. Stages in orientation which represent the blinded individual's reintroduction to normal society can be best ordered in the framework elaborated by Parsons for the process of socialization and psychotherapy.<sup>10</sup> Like the child, the blinded individual is involved in an asymmetrical relationship which excludes the possibility of completely reciprocal interaction. This fundamental lack of equality has been phrased in terms of four components: support; permissiveness; denial of reciprocity; and the manipulation of reward. They imply that the superior in the situation, the agent of society exercises certain behavior mechanisms of a systematic nature when attempting to pull the immature or disordered individual into the major orbit of full societal functioning. He supports the dependent person and permits him to do things which would not be tolerated from an equal. As a price for these concessions, he rejects attempts to get the interaction on a symmetric basis, refusing to accord the other a full potential by disengaging himself from straight-across-the-board relationships. In this atmosphere aggression will not be met by counter aggression, nor will inappropriate behavior be heavily condemned. Finally, he manipulates rewards by withdrawing or manifesting his approval of the other's activities. The rewards are his to distribute and thus form the essential basis of his leverage as a teacher and agent of social control.

The role of blinded soldier is fulfilled primarily with the hospital ward as a stage. Here, the dramatic ebb and flow is centered in the process of socialization and little of the melodramatic can be found. In this insular environment the patient enjoys abundant support and permissiveness; his freedom is the more pronounced because it occurs in a military setting whose code is ordinarily the very obverse

<sup>10</sup> Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1951.



of individual idiosyncrasy. Oddities of dress, speech and motor behavior are tolerated. Attendants are ever-present and aid the blinded soldier in countless ways, even to the extent of providing a variety of entertainments outside the ward. Additionally, the soldier periodically assumes the sick role following orthopedic, eye, or plastic surgery. These frequent respites woven into the re-education process allow for spasmodic release from the pressure exerted by orientation personnel. For mixed with the exaggerated license, described above, are the themes of manipulation, of reward and denial of reciprocity. The protective shelter of the ward is double-edged. As it provides added increments of support, so it allows the application of control devices in a tightly-sealed system.

It is important to observe that the first step in successful reorientation of the blinded soldier is the collection of those so wounded into groups, where they have a common disability and are isolated from other types of patients as well as from the larger society. The manipulation of reward, so essential to the maintenance of therapeutic leverage, might appear as cruelty in a less isolated context, so that special varieties of sanction could not be imposed. In illustration, one blind patient refused to walk to the hospital cafeteria for meals, clinging to his previous routine of eating from a bedside tray. He might have stayed at this level of adjustment had not food been withheld from him for several days, forcing him to go to the cafeteria. In a ward where all were blind, this tactic was possible, since other men were willingly navigating the route to the cafeteria through the application of cane technique. The intimate knowledge of the blind held by the staff allowed for a true evaluation of capacity, making possible effective manipulation of rewards and strategic use of negative sanctions.

If the above incident had occurred in some less distinctive setting, popular feelings of sympathy would have been



built up and enormous pressure would have been directed against the therapeutic agents. Public sympathy, which could so gravely interfere with the socialization of the blind, was of course especially acute in wartime. It is significant that the sighted ward personnel were able to restrain their emotions and occasionally come down hard on the patients. One explanation of their capacity to do so is perhaps related to the human being's tolerance for sympathetic investment. It is as if large numbers of the blind, collected in one place, formed a diffuse stimulus, too unwieldy to be encompassed under any single attendant's rubric of pity. Rather than dissipate their emotional capital, they withdrew it to some distance, and this enabled them to be more effective agents in the resocialization process. From the foregoing it should also be apparent that therapy is not confined to certain roles in the society but takes place in many areas and on many levels. The physician or psychiatrist serves as prototype but therapy is not restricted to these roles alone. Orientation personnel served many therapeutic functions since the relationship was structured in a manner which inevitably led the blinded individual toward heightened levels of expression and conduct. Undoubtedly it was crucial that each blinded individual was assigned a single orientation man, particularly since the physicians within the hospital were organized under a bureaucratic or specialized basis and had little time to fulfill the broader responsibilities of the medical role.

The blind individual at this stage does make random forays outside the ward as when he goes home on furlough or pass. It is something of a shock for him to return home, for there he finds a less structured system of expectations than those held by the ward personnel. The sanctions of the ward are no longer applied and he meets a liberality which constitutes, in effect, oversupport and overpermissiveness. He encounters, too, a kind of overinteraction. At

this early juncture, which takes place while the shooting war still excites the public, the blind soldier is almost by definition a hero. There is as yet no tendency to avoid him but rather to seek him out. Here civilian guilt flowers in the barroom as drinks are pressed on the blind person in a symbolic effort to redress what the sighted feel is an inequality of sacrifice.

When the blinded soldier is discharged from the hospital, he takes up the role of veteran. At first the situation is much like that just described. He still receives huge increments of support and permissiveness. However, as the post-war public euphoria levels off into a less frenzied mood, the blind veteran experiences a gradual withdrawal of support. Society's attitude becomes less guilty and less generous toward its defenders. Patterns of avoidance first appear and they connote an increasing use of social control. For the war blind, the full extent of the loss becomes slowly apparent.

At this point the blind veteran is classed with other veterans and takes part in the common period of post-war adjustment. There is a certain mutuality of relations between ex-soldiers, although in this case the blind have a degree of added leverage because of their obvious combat experience. No one can reasonably claim to have had a rougher war than theirs and a halo attaches itself to their words as the most real of veterans.

Support becomes partially formalized through the receipt of money as disability compensation. Sighted veterans, too, are experiencing the period of readjustment. After the war they received unemployment benefits while they considered their fresh start as civilians. The public has now begun to withdraw most of its supportive attitudes toward the general category of veteran. The ex-soldier who loafs too long is regarded as a bum or neurotic whom war has spoiled. Responsibility for doing nothing constructive in the occu-



pational sense is increasingly attributed to malingering individuals rather than to unsettled social conditions. Among those who linger long in the neighborhood tavern or hang around the corner, the blind are likely to take a prominent place. The veteran stage is a level at which many blind fixate, trying to gain acceptance in a variety of historical roles which are defined by past events rather than present activities.

The final stage of resocialization is that in which the individual becomes a blind man. Shorn of the military referent, he merges with the total civil blind population. There are still gains at this level; however, they are maximized for the passively oriented blind, who are content with a peripheral role in the occupational and social milieu. The advantages in support and permissiveness are minimized, or may even become disadvantages for the blind individual who aspires to the mainstream of American society. In striving to conform to patterns of effort and achievement the blind person must in fact renounce many of these gains because of the obligatory passivity involved in their acceptance. For if he desires the rights of mature role fulfillment, he must accept the correlative obligations of the role just as the sighted person does.

Rewards at this stage often have a mixed character, since it is difficult for the sighted to make a true appraisal of the efforts involved in the achievements of blinded individuals. The blind are often overrewarded in situations which require little expenditure of energy or ingenuity, while underrewarded in those situations which, although having a routine character, require much of the blind. The more active blind, while renouncing the comfortable prerogatives of dependent support, must still confront the denial of reciprocity. This sanction is perhaps the most insidious of all obstacles to full assimilation. Its corrosive effects are mitigated but not essentially changed by the fact that society



finds it hard to invoke such denial frontally, and so skirts the issue by erecting patterns of avoidance and subtle non-acceptance.

Throughout the preceding discussion, there has been an attempt to treat the blind and the larger society as discrete conceptual elements. The artificiality of such a separation is, of course, apparent, since the elements flow together in the reality of social action, and the attempt at separation has failed again and again. At every stage we have in fact found it impossible to speak of the blind without reference to the social mold in which their lives are cast. Each is involved in each, and this chapter describing their mutual commitment clearly reflects the dominant theme of this work.

## CHAPTER III

### Stereotypes and the Social Process

In his rendering of society the sociologist works in a manner which is akin to that of the modern artist. He tries to illuminate the social universe by exploring certain significant facets of human experience. He does not attempt to represent all of life, but abstracts a few critical patterns of action and reaction for analysis in depth. Thus the social scientist focuses on certain elements in the relationships among individuals and does not assay a description of all the varieties of behavior which can be exhibited by those composing a society.

The patterns of human relations which are central to the sociological perspective tend to crystallize around the fulfillment of basic functions necessary for the maintenance of organized group life. Adequately relating to the physical environment, reproducing sexually, educating the young and agreeing on legitimate means for the attainment of important shared goals, all serve as points of anchorage for coordinated social effort.<sup>1</sup> The consensus on which integrated social effort depends and which protects men from Hobb's war of each against all may be described as a system of values to which an overwhelming majority of individuals are committed. The evaluative web provides a framework for the individual's life activities and defines his rights and obligations in diverse contexts of social interaction. Systems of rights and obligations are the abstract expressions of dynamic features inherent in an individual's place in the social scheme, and constitute what may be termed his social roles.

<sup>1</sup> D. F. Aberle, A. K. Cohen, A. K. Davis, M. J. Levy, Jr., and F. X. Sutton, "The Functional Prerequisites of a Society," *Ethics*, Vol. LX, No. 2, January, 1950, pp. 100-111.

Role, which will be the single most important concept in the analysis of the blinded individual's life in American society, is a product of social relationships. A role may only be carried out when both the person filling it and those with whom he deals have agreed to define the appropriate related behavior in a fashion acceptable to each. If behavior diverges too far from the commonly valued definition of the situation, others involved will try various measures to control the deviance and swing it back into acceptable channels. It should also be observed that the individual himself has internal barriers against deviant behavior, in the form of social values which he has long since built into his personality.

The foregoing brief account of social structure stresses the similarities among individuals and the uniformities of value assumptions. Yet it should be clear that any society, especially one as complex as the modern United States, exhibits great variety of life-ways and thought patterns. Rather than a monolithic scheme of values, one finds whole sets of interlocking values which may be understood and mutually accepted but only to a limited extent shared. Thus the incumbents of different social and occupational roles need not behave the same way or hold identical value codes, but they must know what to expect of one another and how to act at their points of contact. The doctor and the patient, the waitress and the customer, the social worker and the client all may hold widely divergent values, but in their relationships expectations have been built up in each which confine their behavior to narrowly prescribed channels.

The various statuses and roles held by a single individual serve to identify him in diverse social situations. American society, in its extreme flexibility, does not often permit one to characterize a person by a single total role covering all situations. Yet, because any person acquires familiarity with a large number of roles during his life, we are able to re-



spond to one another in terms appropriate to whatever role is active at a given moment. It is important to stress that acting out a role oneself and responding to another's role are both learned patterns of action, built up through experience over many years of social life.

An individual taking up the role of blind man is conceptually relocated along the margins of the dominant social structure and a peripheral social role is assigned to him. His rights and obligations are redefined in a manner which is believed to mesh with the character of the disability. The newly blinded person is re-evaluated in all his aspects, and the evaluative scale shifts from the measurement of specific individual qualities or capabilities to the assessment of the global condition of blindness. What distinguishes the blind role from the types of role discussed above is its all pervasive character. Blindness is not an attribute to be put on or cast off as the situation demands, but a constant characteristic which affects the quality of each of the individual's relationships in occupational, recreational and other contexts. When evaluation is thus expanded to cover an individual's entire personality structure, a stereotype is operative. The blind may be assigned a social role which so transforms them that they emerge as a labelled segment of society. Social interaction becomes stunted and artificial under the impress of the stereotype.

Perhaps one approach to the complexity of problems involved in the analysis of stereotypes is a comparison of them with the historical novel. The latter has been defined as resembling an elderly lady's bustle, for while it is a wholly fictitious tale, it rests on a solid basis of fact. Even this rather graphic definition does not fully illustrate the intimacy existing between stereotypes and configurations of status and role. For stereotypes themselves incorporate role components or overlay role types, and may be so firmly woven into the fabric of society that in their functioning a stable inter-

active pattern is elaborated. Normative social relationships evolve as the stereotype reacts back upon the interactive flow and serves as a guide for those engaged in the process as well as for those who are targets of the stereotypical response. The extent and stability of the process is most clearly seen in caste relationships where, for instance, the fully elaborated portrait of the "Uncle Tom" Negro defines appropriate behavior and characteristics, and in so doing defines the reverse side of the coin, the modes of reacting to the stereotypical image.

LaViolette and Silvert in their discussion of the selection, elaboration and filling-in aspects of stereotypical genesis and structuring assert that stereotypes are firmly lodged in the norms of society and tie into social systems insofar as they are organized about basic premises of group interaction.<sup>2</sup> In thus relating the concept to the larger social system of which it is a partial product, the authors state that the clarity, generality, intensity and perseverance of the stereotype will be linked to the degree of continuity and rate of change characteristic of the society. The acquisition of stereotypes throughout the socialization process implies that they are a product of social differentiation, aiding in the maintenance of one's own status and identification with the group in which they are employed.

Stereotypes are linked with judgments of value and may be favorable or unfavorable. Outgroups often bear the burden of negative stereotypes, while the standard image of the ingroup ordinarily has positive characteristics as may be seen in the comments, "That was white of you", or "Black as the devil."<sup>3</sup> Stereotypes of both ingroups and outgroups, however, often have a bi-polar quality. In illustration, the image of the lower class "wop" may be complemented by

<sup>2</sup> Forrest LaViolette, and K. H. Silbert, "A Theory of Stereotypes," *Social Forces*, 1951, Vol. 29, pp. 257-262.

<sup>3</sup> G. E. Simpson and J. M. Yinger, *Racial and Cultural Minorities*, New York, Harper and Bros., 1953, p. 189.



the figure of the delightfully carefree Italian. Moreover, stereotypical responses have a logic of their own which enables the individual conditioned by the stereotype to voice generalizations which are contradictory in character. All Jews, for instance, may be accused of being dirty Communists as well as dirty capitalists, whichever is more congenial to the accuser's momentary frame of reference. Such generalizations may be rooted in projection, as the process of forming a stereotype is similar to the process of reacting to an ambiguous stimulus. A positive or negative halo effect may also be found, as in the stereotype of the blind when the disability is generalized to characteristics unaffected by the injury, and will result in devaluation or overevaluation of the entire individual.

Thus, stereotypes vary in their intensity and in their power to impinge on the individual's total complex of statuses and roles. Those who are not defined in stereotypical terms can play various discrete roles, each of which is partially insulated by time and space from the individual's other status role configurations. Significant others who view them in a specific role will shift their expectations in accordance with that new role. The stereotypical process tends to interfere with this usual experience of being met by a system of expectations appropriate to each of the many different roles assumed by the individual. A blinded person, for instance, will never become a lawyer; he will become a blind lawyer. The Negro, the Asiatic, the cripple, all are subject to the same fate.<sup>4</sup> Not only does the stereotype impose artificiality upon the role playing process itself, but, in addition, it tends to reduce arbitrarily the repertoire of roles ordinarily permitted to those who are unmarred by its functioning.

If the blind are seen as a minority grouping, it might be

<sup>4</sup> Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Cambridge, Mass., Addison-Welsey Publishing Co., Inc. 1954.



instructive to compare them with other minorities such as Jews and Negroes. Dollard, for instance, asserts that, "Lack of time sense and other irresponsible traits have often made the behavior of Negroes seem inscrutable to white people, who claim never to know what is going on in Negro heads."<sup>5</sup> This can be roughly paralleled by the attitudes of the sighted toward the blind, since it is often asserted that the blind have a whole set of feelings which cannot be comprehended by those possessing sight. Characterizing minorities in this manner probably reduces certain strains in the interpersonal process for majority group members for they are then prepared to meet, and expect to find, the unexpected. However, the anticipation that minority group members will behave in strange or incomprehensible fashion opens the door to majority misinterpretation of routine minority actions.

In like manner minority group members may badly misinterpret the actions of those who surround them. Their heightened sensitivity to the minority status implies that careless or ambiguous acts may be open to a variety of interpretations. The tendency is, of course, to misinterpret these actions and see the subtle hand of prejudice at work. Certain blind individuals may also view their social environment in a manner which is fundamentally the same. They may look upon gestures of helpfulness or courtesy, which would be accorded anyone, as an attempt to define them as being wholly inadequate or lacking minimal capacities.

A further parallel concerning the more actively oriented blind is centered in their attempt to play out their lives in a manner which is much like that of the noninjured. Very frequently their actions will fail to gain social recognition, and like the middle class Negro they will be summarily marked out for the stereotypical response thought appro-

<sup>5</sup> John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, New York, Harper & Bros., 1949, p. 409.

priate to the minority group as a whole. "The middle class Negro tries to maintain allegiance to the dominant American standards and he experiences the bitter fact that this allegiance is not rewarded as it is in the white caste; instead he is ignominiously lumped in with persons in his own caste whose behavior standards are inferior to his own."<sup>6</sup>

Analogues may be found even in the most complex areas of intergroup action and point up the essentially marginal position of the blind. A prejudicial or marginal atmosphere will tend to infect the behavior or personality of the minority group member and shape his life into paths different from those experienced by the majority. Various traits such as conspicuous consumption or display of material possessions which often characterize the Negro and Jew are directly related to the harsh social molds in which their lives have been cast. Socially induced defects of this sort can then be employed by the majority as solid rationale for the imposition of the stereotypical response.

While the blind are confronted with what might be called positive rather than negative prejudice, a like effect may be found. For by falling in with the solicitous attitudes which surround him, the blinded individual will become selfish or demanding and display other defects which inhere in the stereotype of the blind. Even the more sophisticated may erroneously tend to locate the source of this behavior within the blind minority. "In my opinion, the public places the blind in a class by themselves because of the many eccentricities which are common among them, and because of a spirit of selfishness."<sup>7</sup> Various other actions and beliefs held by the sighted can trigger off a response among the blind which tends only to confirm the sighted individual in his original belief. Passivity or invalidism can be fostered

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 424-425.

<sup>7</sup> Emil Fries, "The Social Psychology of Blindness," in *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, April-June, 1930, p. 21.



in the blind, as the assumption of incapacity produces real incapacity.

Certain crucial differences exist, of course, between the blind and other minorities. Perhaps the most obvious is that the status of blindness can be assumed at any time throughout the life cycle while the status of Negro is fixed at birth. In this respect the war blind would be more analogous to an adult immigrant, since their newly acquired status implies that others will relate to them in terms of the characteristics thought to inhere in the more general category. Further significant insights might be gathered by contrasting various stereotypes. Unlike Uncle Tom, who has his counterpart in Aunt Jemima, the image of the blind is customarily linked to one sex. The blind beggar is always male. There is little need to evolve a stereotype of blind women, since they have traditionally tended to insulate themselves from the larger society. Negro women, however, engage the majority group at several points and are members of a highly elaborated subculture.

It is critically important, in analyzing the social position of the blind, to examine the various forces which lead to the elaboration of marginal subcultures and to further examine the failure of marginal individuals to evolve internally cohesive subgroupings. Lemert points up the problem through his difficulty in ordering the blind to a subcultural category. He states, after observing minor tendencies toward subcultural formation, that "The special culture is communicated under the sponsorship of sighted groups, rather than being an indigenous cultural growth among those without vision."<sup>8</sup> He concludes by stating that, at least within this society, the need to elaborate a subculture of the blind is missing since the nature of the societal reaction obviates the necessity.

<sup>8</sup> Edwin M. Lemert, *Social Pathology*, New York, McGraw-Hill Inc., 1951, p. 106.



Lacking a well defined subculture, the blind are unable to exercise certain mechanisms of social control and this lack offers one final point of comparison as the blind are seen over against other more established minority groupings. Negroes can be used in illustration since they have worked through their lives within a well defined cultural substructure, and the cohesiveness of their group rests in part on a full awareness of dominant attitudes and orientations. In this atmosphere Negroes sometimes employ the stereotype of the Uncle Tom as a mechanism of control within their own grouping. During World War II Negro officers who asked "bright questions" or displayed any kind of ingratiating behavior toward white officers were immediately subjected to negative group sanctions by other Negroes. The mechanism employed was simple and effective. If the behavior occurred outside, the surrounding group of officers would take the right toe of their shoe and run it through the sand, as Uncle Tom might do when talking to the white plantation boss. Internal group cohesiveness could be maintained and a united front put forth when action was dictated in relation to such subjects as the right of Negroes to enter officers' clubs. Individual Negroes whose behavior varied from the internal group norms were said to be "sanding" or "Tomming," and the strength of this sanction was usually sufficient to bring those who deviated solidly back into the minority group.

Together with other factors, the lack of a subculture or normative substructure deprives the blind of mechanisms of internal social control. Legitimate negative sanctions will be primarily located in the larger society except in those limited areas where the blind are brought together and a subculture is elaborated.

Where blind subcultures do exist, however, they are commonly linked to negative rather than to positive goals. The cohesive forces stem almost wholly from aggressive

attempts to strike back at members of outgroups who have themselves been traditionally concerned with the blind. Specialized agencies and organizations are increasingly bearing the brunt of these attacks, and gradually the blind are gathering onto themselves a sense of the oppressed minority.

Shifting the analysis to a more psychological level, further complexities in the workings and countless guises of the stereotype appear. Bogardus, for instance, suggests that stereotypes may serve as defense mechanisms locked into the individual's security system.<sup>9</sup> They may be activated to allay the strain invoked by competing frames of reference, or as indicated earlier, they may have an unconscious self-referent. While the focus here is upon the stereotype as it is seen in the broader framework making up the social structure, other underlying concepts and ideas relating to blindness may disturb the surface flow of action. In psychoanalytic literature, for instance, such emotionally intense objects as the figure of the mother, the soul, the conscience and male potency have been symbolically linked to the visual function or its lack. Such concepts as devouring or incorporation, power as one transfixes with a stare and sin as in the Oedipus legend, have also been linked to the axis of sight and blindness.<sup>10</sup> All these underlying forces may have their covert impact upon the interactive process, and their reality is manifest in the universal flux of emotion that distorts and colors the reactions of those who engage the blind.

Further, there may be an overidentification with the blind, resulting in misdirected sympathy; or, unconscious motivation may be in sharp conflict with the motivations

<sup>9</sup> E. Bogardus, "Stereotypes versus Sociotypes," *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. 34, 1950, pp. 286-291.

<sup>10</sup> Gerard Schauer, "Motivation of Attitudes Toward Blindness," in *Attitudes Toward Blindness*, New York, American Foundation for the Blind, Social Research Series No. 1, 1951, pp. 5-10.



found on the surface of behavior, making for a vacillating instability in routine patterns of orientation. Various authors have recognized that the blind, as members of society, must themselves possess these covert impulses to some degree, since injury to body organs will in some way affect the body image. While this reverse side of the coin will not be fully explored, Schauer indicates the range of reactions to be found at this level: "Reactions to such attitudes directed to the self and to the other person may be fear, shame, hostility, disgust, guilt of various forms, and also emotions of pity and a compulsive need to help, or to avoid help."<sup>11</sup>

A comprehensive description of the stereotype and an analysis of the attitudes it fosters will be presented in the following chapter. Here, the focus will be upon selected aspects of the many-faceted structure which seem basic and have marked implications for the process of social interaction. The socially heightened element of differentiation brought to the blind through their blindness is crucial to the analysis of the stereotypical structure. Through differentiation, the social ground is made ready for the building of a complex set of attitudes which are readily imposed on the blinded individual. The marked social visibility of the blind makes it easy to link these attitudes to them. "Passing" is not feasible for the totally blind, thus they lack the escape channel sometimes available to other minorities such as mulattoes or Jews. It should be observed, however, that the accepted definition of blindness encompasses a range of individuals who might better be characterized as the partially seeing. Within this group there is some evidence of "passing" as sighted individuals. There are still others who are located between the partially seeing and the totally blind. This range would include those who have something more than light perception, a limited field of

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.



vision which may vary slightly with time and situation. The instabilities found in their social position may be translated into severe personality conflicts. Lacking a well defined social role, and unable to play fully either a blind or sighted part, these individuals are placed in a situation continually fraught with uncertainty.

Social differentiation also implies that blindness makes many inroads on the individual's privacy. The blinded person can no longer merge with the crowd; his social visibility is such that anonymous relationships with the society become virtually impossible. From still another perspective, the differentiating process may lead to feelings of inadequacy or insecurity among the sighted. For in their relations with the blind they may feel that they are being evaluated through the use of a different set of standards or hierarchy of cues than they are accustomed to in their relations with others. A study of the fictional treatment of blindness recounts an interesting plot stressing this possibility.<sup>12</sup>

H. G. Wells' short story, "The Country of the Blind," embodies the strange fancy of a land where all the inhabitants are blind, and the one seeing man who strays in is at a disadvantage in relation to those whose lives are ordered on the basis of four senses. He not only fails to be made king, but he fails in his efforts to master even the most routine tasks assigned to him. It has been remarked that the greatest difficulties of the blind arise from the fact that the world as constituted was made by the seeing for the seeing. This story tries to reverse the order and construct a world on the basis of four senses.

Viewed in the context of the larger social system, the blind may be seen as members of a differentiated group, a

<sup>12</sup> Jessica L. Langworthy, "Blindness in Fiction: A Study of the Attitude of Authors Toward Their Blind Characters," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, June, 1930, pp. 269-286.

labeled segment of society having a marginal position. The social norms and value patterns which usually regulate one's own behavior and offer a framework for the evaluation of others are not applied when a blinded individual is under discussion. The inferiority-superiority yardstick ordinarily used has little applicability, since the blind are generally thought to fall outside this continuum. Differentiation results in a wholly new scale on which evaluation can occur without reference to the evaluator's own position. Separation of the blind is effectively established through the application of new normative standards and the expectations which are linked to them. While Muir's perspective is one of reintegration with the normative structure of the larger society, she expresses a complete awareness of the fact of separation in asserting, "I have regained such a measure of sight as to feel that I am reinstated, at least in part, among the great family of normal human beings."<sup>13</sup>

Muir's "reinstatement" not only illustrates the differentiating process, but it also suggests the crucial impact which blindness has upon status. Implications for status arise to the extent that the blind are set apart from accustomed reference groups. Their failures, for instance, receive an exaggerated sympathy, while their achievements are frequently viewed with amazement. Like the child, a blinded individual often receives lavish praise incommensurate with the given performance, and his failures tend to be understood rather than condemned.

Charity of a more formal character has negative implications for the status of the recipient, not only because giving usually entails a downward flow of action but also because the giving relationship has a one-way character. A wide range of behavior can be directed toward the blind with little threat to one's own status, for like children they

<sup>13</sup> D. Muir, "Some Aspects of Blindness," *The New Beacon*, The National Institute for the Blind, Vol. XIX, No. 223, July, 1935, p. 173.



are both in and out of the status hierarchy and fall in a category which is both valued and devalued.

Society's generosity, its eagerness to help, and the ever present emotion of pity all combine to reinforce the stereotyped image of the beggar, and tend to characterize the general reaction to the blind. Pity is perhaps the core response stimulated by the wan face and the bent posture, a hopeless blind figure unable to function adequately in the major areas of life.<sup>14</sup> Active blind persons who are marked out for this response are socially or psychologically damaged through the resulting artificiality of their social relationships, for the actions and reactions of the noninjured are often filtered through a stereotypical framework which distorts the interactive process. The permanence of blindness and its high social visibility intensifies the damage that may be inflicted on the individual's personality organization by the matrix of attitudes and beliefs. The attempt by the active blind to play a role which conforms essentially to dominant values is effectively frustrated as society generously ladles out vast amounts of help, requiring only that the blind remain in a social position commensurate with the emotion of pity.

One aspect of this complex emotion derives from the fact that blindness is considered the most difficult injury to endure. Vision with all that it implies is a highly prized bodily possession. While sight is seldom consciously evaluated, it gains added worth when the stimulus of a blinded individual suggests the possibility of its loss. Those who lack vision become fit objects of pity, and are often thought to spend much time in mourning the loss of their sight. On a more theoretical level society often requires the blinded individ-

<sup>14</sup> The work of Joseph S. Himes, Jr., has contributed much to the present analysis. For those interested in the imagery or ideational content of the stereotype, both the blind beggar and blind genius are fully portrayed in his paper, "Some Concepts of Blindness in American Culture," in *Attitudes Toward Blindness*, New York, American Foundation for the Blind, 1951, pp. 10-22.



ual to play the role of mourner. "The requirement of mourning" stems in part from society's need to hold high its values.<sup>15</sup> If the injured individual does not continually display suffering, he implies a lack of respect for the valued object by his rejection of the suffering role.

Although the compulsive need to assist the blind tends to keep them in an uneasy, devalued category, many of them find compensation by accepting the support and permissiveness so freely given. The blinded individual can reject the implications of the stereotype at great cost to himself, but he has a natural tendency to play the part society has cast him in. Narrow and stunted as the part may be, it is firmly woven into the social fabric and conformity with it brings some predictability and stability into interpersonal relationships. The expectations of society have left their mark upon the blind and passive dependent blind individuals are far from rare. Their appearance supports and reinforces the attitudinal structure that played its part in producing them. "Observers still continue to note the poor condition of blind children and a high proportion of a passive receptive type of personality."<sup>16</sup>

In conforming to the stereotype, many blinded individuals deliberately foster the concept of the sixth sense and other qualities such as heightened powers of hearing and touch. It may be falsely asserted by the blind, for instance, that they can not only distinguish the denomination of paper money, but also identify different colors through use of the tactile sense. Such assertions of heightened power may

<sup>15</sup> Tamara Dembo, Gloria Ladieu, and Beatrice A. Wright, *Social-Psychological Rehabilitation of the Physically Handicapped: Adjustment to Misfortune, A Study in Social Emotional Relationships Between Injured and Non-Injured People*. Final Report, Army Medical Research and Development Board, Office of the Surgeon-General, War Department, Hilgard, Dembo, W-49-007-MD-325, Supplement #5, p. 45, April 1, 1948.

<sup>16</sup> Hector Chevigny and Sydell Braverman, *The Adjustment of the Blind*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950, p. 27.

aid in shoring up the ego ideal and serve as inoffensive outlets for aggression against a highly credulous public. From another perspective, the concept of the sixth sense may have resisted rational attack and remained on the cultural scene for reasons that have their locus in the larger society. The concept seems functional for the sighted since it offers the blind a form of compensation for their disability, tending to reintroduce a certain equality in human relationships. Then too, the concept of the sixth sense is a convenient explanatory mechanism masking the sheer lack of knowledge that surrounds blindness.

In a somewhat narrower context, conformity with the stereotype can be seen again in the lack of gratitude sometimes associated with the more humble figure of the blind beggar. Ingratitude may in fact be a crude ego defense mechanism employed by the blind in their attempt to maintain an acceptable self-portrait, a task made difficult by the flood of helpfulness which spills over into areas that are actually within the blinded individual's control.

The stereotype of the blind can be maintained not only by widespread conformity and heightened by the media of mass communication but as in so many other stereotypical structures there is a second line of defense which strengthens the shibboleth by explaining away exceptions to the rule. The alternative to the image of the blind beggar is the blind genius.<sup>17</sup> Genius is the residual category for those blind individuals who manifestly outstrip the beggar stereotype. The genius, however, is equivalent to the beggar in all basic respects except that underestimation has been replaced by overestimation. The simplistic fallacy is still fully operative although the direction of the vectors in the model has been reversed.

Another implication of the stereotype has perhaps even greater importance. For the few components or exaggerated

<sup>17</sup> Joseph S. Himes, Jr., *op. cit.*



qualities which constitute the minimal image necessarily imply that the image will be surrounded by broad amorphous areas. Such ill-structured regions offer no aid to the sighted in defining any given situation which may arise in interpersonal relationships. Interaction, then, will suffer from a double abnormality, for the larger society is not only burdened with the formal stereotype, some admixture of facts, projections, exaggerations, errors and inventions, but is further crippled by a sheer lack of knowledge concerning the blind. While the absence of well defined attitudes allows the blind, in some cases, to construct and play out an almost wholly new social role, their actions will lack an interpretive context. Tensions will be introduced into the most casual relationships as the blind, particularly the more active blind, fall outside the sighted individual's manageable social view. Amazement may be expressed at the performance of the simplest acts, since there is little awareness of how the blind conduct themselves in daily living. Thus, the lack of predictability will disturb routine human relatedness, jamming the usual rapid fire interpersonal network. Accustomed stability and security will be undermined by the absence of social meaning inherent in these vague areas unfilled by stereotypical conceptions.

For the blinded individual, the lack of stability implies that he may no longer find security in a stable system of expectations. Further his novel position implies that he will find it difficult to maintain a firm or acceptable self-image. As a member of society possessing many of its attitudes, he must rework them into a consistent and acceptable self-portrait which will enable him to counter the instability found within his social environment. The social world of the blind, like that of other marginal groupings, is fraught with conflict. Unstable perception leads to such polarized emotional responses as acceptance or rejection and valuation or devaluation. Their social ground is such that inse-



curity becomes a prominent feature of their life routine, for the blind can no longer be sure of meeting a firm series of attitudes and expectations, and acceptance itself becomes problematic.

Social stereotyping, then, is a mechanism utilized to label subgroupings within the society. Stereotypical structures overlay whole occupational segments, racial and religious groups and many other social categories and classes. The stereotypical sketch is socially colored-in through the acceptance of the various qualities which are thought to inhere in a particular category. Toward the blind, as toward others, there is a tendency to impose on the unique richness of the individual a preconceived structure which is tacitly assumed to be applicable to all members of the given group.

Stereotypes, woven into the fabric of society and built into the individual throughout the socialization process, have functionally positive as well as negative implications, in that they define modal or normative ways of reacting.<sup>18</sup> Although they arbitrarily reduce the fullness of life, they do bring the complex social scene into some sort of manageable focus. They lend a minimal meaning to areas which might otherwise be voids in the pattern of social awareness, since the various stereotypes simplify abstract qualities and enable the individual in a complicated social system to maneuver rapidly among a network of roles.

The stereotype tends to define standardized definitions of social situations and to offer a basis of social control, as well as making possible those predictions of behavior necessary to the stability of any interactive system. Control of the blind is achieved largely through the mechanism of role segmentation, for many roles accorded the noninjured are split off from the blinded individual's possible repertoire. Particularistic or stereotypical behavior is introduced to fill the

<sup>18</sup> Joseph S. Himes, Jr., *op. cit.*

resultant void. While the stereotype may be markedly dysfunctional for a segment of the blind population, it affords the members of the larger society a mechanism for the management of tension in their interpersonal relationships, and through the social expectations found within it, the needs of the less active blind may be fairly well accommodated. The active blind, oriented toward dominant values, find stability, predictability and orderly expectations to be insufficient reward for fulfilling the stereotypical role. The price is too high for this segment of the blind. For them, the net balance of functional and dysfunctional consequences leans heavily toward the negative.

In attempting to capture the atmosphere surrounding the blind it was necessary to describe various underlying regulative social processes. It was suggested that individuals within the society tend to achieve or are offered a semi-structured place, a framework of orientation for their interactive relationships. The analysis provides a backdrop for the examination of the actively oriented blind, who are theoretically marginal to the structure, since both their status and role have a peripheral character unencompassed by a wholly stable system of expectations. The more active blind have rejected the partial security to be found in society's stereotypical definition of their status, and have struck out in search of roles customarily locked into the dominant status structure. In redefining their social roles, however, they continue to be met by a system of expectations which does not mesh with the new definition they are attempting to impose. Support for the new basis on which action may be patterned is rarely achieved and at best extends only to a relatively small group who have accepted the blind individual's redefinition of the situation. For the most part, complementary or reciprocal definitions, which are the key to stability in the interactive process, have been disrupted and the blinded individual must, if he is to succeed



in these new roles actively impose a wholly new pattern of relationships upon those who engage him.

Various complications arise in defining and elaborating a novel framework of action and reaction. For not only do the active blind lack certain characteristics associated with their new roles, but they positively belong to a social segment which itself has a relatively fixed status definition.<sup>19</sup> Their lack of visual capacity also implies that the means to achieving certain ends must be refashioned in a manner which will take into account the visual loss.

While interaction has been stressed this chapter has attempted to enter relationships from the societal point of view, focusing on this side of the behavioral flow. In later sections of this work conceptualization will more nearly approach the symmetry which distinguishes the ideal interactive model. It should be recognized that the concentration on difficulties in interaction between the blind and the sighted may have tended by contrast to overstate the symmetry found in sighted interaction, which is obviously not without strain nor wholly stable.

<sup>19</sup> Everett C. Hughes, "Social Change and Status Protest," *Phylon*, Vol. X (First Quarter, 1949), pp. 58-65.



## CHAPTER IV

### Attitudes Toward Blindness

The present chapter deals primarily with a questionnaire exploring various attitudes of high school seniors toward blindness. It should be stated initially that the linkage of this empirical material with earlier discussions based upon the larger society is far from direct, since the character of the present sample necessarily limits the range of generalization. The questionnaire results were highly suggestive, however, and led into or pointed up various problems as well as giving some direction to the formulations offered earlier. While a limited set of statements can now be made concerning attitudes toward the blind, and toward blindness compared with other disabilities, the position taken in previous chapters must remain largely descriptive and exploratory.

#### The Questionnaire: Form and Administration

The questionnaire was administered in the suburban area of New York City. Two high schools were selected, and although both were in the same district, they were decidedly different as to community setting. Class was assigned in terms of these settings since they offered a crude index to social position, one being markedly middle class in character, while the other was distinctly lower class. They varied sharply in terms of the number of students continuing their education, in terms of community taxes, home ownership and the presence or absence of minority groups. The lower-class community had a self-contained industrial economic base, while the source of wealth in the middle-class community stemmed from the New York business world with commuting the dominant pattern. The respondents

were roughly divided on sex and class factors: fifty-three were students in the middle-class school and fifty-one attended the lower-class school; the middle-class group included twenty-five males and twenty-eight females, while the lower-class group was composed of twenty-two males and twenty-nine females. The total sample consisted of one hundred and four high school seniors.

Pretests were conducted in the greater Boston area and the questionnaire was built upon both personal experience and a survey of the literature of blindness.<sup>1</sup>

Three distinct areas are represented in the instrument. A series of physical disabilities, among them blindness, was ranked as to their impact upon the self and a prospective mate. Second, a group of thirteen situations was presented involving the respondent and a hypothetical blind acquaintance of the same sex as the respondent. Finally, the questionnaire concluded with the presentation of a series of forty-six agree-disagree questions, which were concerned primarily with stereotypical attitudes often directed toward the blind.

### Blindness Among the Disabilities

The significance of blindness was first explored in the context of four other disabilities. The subjects were asked to rank order five potential injuries as to their impact upon the self and prospective mate: an injury resulting in the amputation of one arm, an injury resulting in blindness, an injury resulting in severe burns of the face, an injury resulting in the amputation of one leg and an injury resulting in deafness.

The series of disabilities was presented to the subjects

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to, among others, Dr. Eleanor Maccoby and Miss Alison Robbins, the former for her constant advice throughout the construction of the questionnaire, and the latter for conducting the pretest on two separate occasions.

with the following instructions and were to be ordered in terms of their impact upon the self:

Which of the following do you feel is the worst injury that could happen to you? Place a number (1) beside the injury that would be most difficult to face, a number (2) beside the next most difficult to face, and so on through (5), which would be for you the easiest injury to face.

The identical series of disabilities was then presented to the subjects with the instructions:

Which of the following is the worst injury that could happen to a person you would like to marry? Place a number (1) beside the injury which would be the most difficult to accept in the person you wanted to marry, a number (2) beside the next most difficult, and so on through (5) which would be for you the easiest injury to accept in the person you had chosen to marry.

Briefly, the theoretical position underlying these separate tasks involved the assumption that each of the several disabilities varied as to its poignancy and that this variation was in part culturally determined. It was felt that distinct patterns would emerge in relation to the major variables, sex and class, as well as subpatterns within the two major categories. Essentially, the exploration sought to determine the subject's conception of his relationship to the disabled in both the self-focused task and the task centered upon a prospective mate. The location of blindness was pivotal among the several disabilities. On other levels it should be observed that the disabilities have marked implications for the subject's body image which is, of course, one of the subtly unique aspects of personality structure. The responses of any one individual will thus be colored by his uniquely irrational and symbolic experiences, as well as by the pressure of cultural uniformities. While the central concern is with the patterning of responses, the general technique may have important implications for psychological



investigations, since it facilitates the identification of those individuals who vary sharply from the norm.

### Code Material

The most economical presentation of the subjects' responses dictates the use of the following code. First, the category, an injury resulting in the amputation of one arm will be abbreviated to arm. Similarly, the remaining categories will be referred to as blindness, burns, leg, and deafness. G represents respondents from the middle-class school, while H represents respondents from the lower-class school. M represents male subjects, F female subjects and T represents total figures. The mean rank, it might be observed, is simply the average position given to a disability by a group of subjects, and since here five items are being ranked to the second decimal place the possible range falls between 1.00 and 5.00

TABLE I  
THE IMPACT OF THE DISABILITIES UPON THE SELF

	<i>Mean Ranks for the Self</i>								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	HM	HF	GM	GF	H	G	M	F	T
Arm	3.50	3.79	3.60	3.54	3.67	3.57	3.55	3.67	3.62
Blindness	1.18	1.55	1.16	1.36	1.39	1.26	1.17	1.46	1.33
Burns	3.55	3.07	4.20	4.07	3.27	4.13	3.89	3.56	3.71
Leg	3.27	3.28	2.76	2.82	3.27	2.79	3.00	3.05	3.03
Deafness	3.50	3.31	3.28	3.21	3.39	3.25	3.38	3.26	3.32

In column T of Table I it may be readily seen that blindness was overwhelmingly selected as the worst possible disability, having a mean rank of 1.33. Stated differently, slightly more than  $\frac{4}{5}$  of the respondents placed blindness in the first position, finding it the most difficult of the injuries to face. No differences of any magnitude are found

between the total male and female respondents in terms of mean rank, nor does the total class dichotomy as represented by subjects from the middle-class school and the lower-class school offer any important pattern variation. No differences of consequence are found between subcategories ordered by sex and class. The single crucial pattern is the overwhelming choice of blindness as first in the hierarchy of injuries. Following blindness in the series of mean rank are: leg, deafness, arm, and burns with T rank positions of 3.03, 3.32, 3.62 and 3.71 respectively.

As can be seen in Table I, columns 5 and 6, an injury resulting in a leg amputation offers interesting class differences, with G respondents assigning a rank of 2.79 while H respondents assign a rank of 3.27. The respondents' sex had little impact on this result since members of group G were fairly unanimous in their ranking of the injury, GM 2.76, GF 2.82, and group H also exhibited a class consensus, HM 3.27, HF 3.28.

Deafness falls in the third position with an assigned T mean of 3.32. The mean rank obscures an extremely interesting bimodality that can be seen in an examination of the raw data responses.<sup>2</sup> Casting this material in percentage terms: 1 per cent ranked deafness first, rising sharply to 41 per cent in the second position, then falling to 13 per cent in each of the next two positions, while finally building up to 31 per cent in the fifth and last position. This polarized effect cross-cuts both sex and class factors, and has important implications for the perception of deafness as a social handicap.

Injury resulting in the amputation of one arm is ranked fourth, having a T mean rank of 3.62. Aside from its position within the series of disabilities, the injury offers little in the way of analysis, since the various submeans uniformly cluster about the total rank.

<sup>2</sup> For reasons of space and presentation the tables of raw data have been excluded from the present text.

Severe burns of the face was ranked last, with a T mean of 3.71. While females tended to be somewhat more concerned than males, as can be seen through a comparison of columns 7 and 8 of Table I, the trend was not as pronounced as anticipated. Lower-class females, however, displayed greater concern regarding the disability than did any of the other subsamples. The impact of class background had a crucial effect upon the importance attached to the disability as striking differences in the mean ranks may be seen in Columns 5 and 6 of Table I, with H respondents ranking burns 3.27 while G respondents ranked the injury 4.13. Percentage breakdowns of the raw data further emphasize the class differences as 43 per cent of the respondents in class H ranked the disability either second or third, with the next largest grouping, 29 per cent, ordering the injury to the last position. In class G, however, much less relative weight was given to the injury, with only 11 per cent placing the disability in the second or third position, while 59 per cent ranked it in the last category.

TABLE II

THE IMPACT OF A PROSPECTIVE MATE'S  
DISABILITIES UPON THE SELF

	<i>Mean Ranks for Mate</i>								
	1 HM	2 HF	3 GM	4 GF	5 H	6 G	7 M	8 F	9 T
Arm	3.64	3.66	3.28	3.39	3.65	3.34	3.45	3.53	3.49
Blindness	1.82	2.00	2.76	2.18	1.92	2.45	2.32	2.09	2.19
Burns	2.77	2.83	2.92	3.86	2.80	3.42	2.85	3.33	3.12
Leg	2.77	3.17	2.08	2.43	3.00	2.26	2.40	2.81	2.63
Deafness	4.00	3.34	3.96	3.14	3.63	3.53	3.98	3.25	3.58

Turning to the mean ranks of the same five disabilities when the task was centered on the prospective mate, it may be seen from Table II, column 9, that blindness was again selected as the most difficult of the injuries to accept. A



class difference appears in a comparison of columns 5 and 6, with G respondents consistently ordering the injury to a lower position than do H respondents. The heaviest contribution to this difference is offered by the GM subsample, as emphasized by an examination of columns 1, 2, 3 and 4. The middle-class male is alone in assigning blindness to the second position, and affords a striking contrast to the lower-class male who assigns to the injury a mean rank greater than that given by any of the remaining subsamples.

Blindness in the series of disabilities is followed by leg, burns, arm and deafness with T rank positions of 2.63, 3.12, 3.49 and 3.58, respectively.

In considering the prospective mate, male respondents tend to emphasize the injury resulting in the loss of one leg more than do female respondents, as may be seen through contrasting columns 7 and 8 of Table II. Further, a marked class difference appears with the heaviest contribution being made by the middle-class males. The GM respondents are alone in placing a leg injury first in the series of disabilities.

Considering severe burns of the face, in columns 1, 2, 3 and 4, the single crucial variation is found in the middle-class female's reaction to the disability. The GF subsample places little relative stress on this injury, ordering it to the last position.

While a slight class factor emerges in the distribution of means relating to the arm injury, the disability offers little of interest since, as in the self-focused task, the various means tend to cluster about the total rank position.

The primary interest in the response to deafness lies in an examination of total sex differences. Columns 7 and 8 point up the relatively greater importance the disability has for the female when considering a prospective mate.

### Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Many forces are at work in the evaluation of various disabilities. Any ranking is probably an unspecifiable compound of reality testing, as when an injury is judged both with reference to its probable economic consequences and raw emotional response. Thus the evaluator can experience revulsion at the suggestion of disfigurement or approach the disability in a manner which has a more neutral character. Furthermore, we have no measure of the intensity of the subjects' involvement in their task, or of their imaginative capacity for the empathic identification they must be presumed to make. Therefore, no attempt is made to assess the significance of differences in precise statistical terms. Yet some attention must be given to differences which run consistently in the same direction.

The series of disabilities was separated into two major classes for purposes of analysis. It was assumed that both blindness and deafness tend to place the individual in a markedly dependent relationship, and that the emphasis would be primarily upon their debilitating character. It was further assumed that the categories arm, leg and burns leave the individual in an essentially independent position and that the focus would be upon their mutilating qualities. This division of disabilities into two classes is legitimate in comparative or relative terms only, since it could obviously be asserted that certain of the disabilities have some impact along both the mutilating and debilitating dimensions. Various other considerations would also qualify this classification. Blindness, for instance, is heavily colored with emotions other than those stemming directly from its debilitating character. The response to deafness may be even less clear in terms of the classification, since alternative sets of values may be generated. The injury may be seen either in its impact on the debilitating dimension or in its lack of

force with respect to mutilation. Further, the loss of arm and leg would have an effect in the debilitating sphere as well as in the sphere of mutilation. Burns of the face, however, obviously has its greatest impact in the realm of mutilation.

With the above qualifications, severe burns of the face and the loss of an arm or leg still tend drastically to mar the body, and the effect is heightened when compared over against the remaining disabilities, blindness and deafness. These latter two disabilities have their primary effect along the debilitating dimension and force the individual into a dependent relationship.

There is a pronounced tendency for all individuals in all situations to fear the debilitating conditions more than the mutilating ones. However, the respondents tend to fear debilitation for themselves more than for a prospective mate, and to fear mutilation more strongly with reference to a mate than to themselves. This reversal is situationally conditioned. The mate situation is richer and more complex than the self situation, since the reaction to injury is overlaid by the reaction to imagined interpersonal patterns of courtship, love and marriage. New values, introduced by new role configurations, intensify the expressive import of injury to the mate. This tendency would, of course, be conditioned by the strength of narcissistic elements in the respondent. Males tend to fear mutilation of the partner more than females do, a finding that is in accord with the different role portraits of men and women in our society. Both sexes accept the postulate that debility would interfere most with masculine conceptions of potency and economic responsibility, while mutilation would more severely hamper feminine sexual attractiveness and capacity to be a well-groomed representative of family status. The tendency to fear mutilation most keenly with respect to the mate holds up across the social class variable. It is stronger, however, in



the middle class where the function of the mate as a representative of status is more pronounced. It is strongest of all for the middle-class male, who is alone in actually reversing the general proposition that debility outweighs mutilation. Leg amputation, a mutilating disability, is more to be dreaded for his prospective mate than is blindness.

An interesting arrangement of the questionnaire data affords a comparison of role concepts and a gauge of the extent to which these concepts as held by men and women complement one another. The disability rankings may be so ordered as to contrast the middle-class female's ranking for herself with the middle-class male's ranking for his prospective mate, and so on through the possible combinations of sex and social class. Although this procedure does not reveal a perfect symmetry of expectation or a perfect sharing of common values, it does illuminate a very striking articulation of value structures and interlocked attitudes.

Middle-class females' ranking of the disabilities for themselves is intriguingly at variance with middle-class males' evaluation for the mate. This variance, which demonstrates again the middle-class males' overwhelming concern with mutilation in the mate, points up cross-sex differences in expectation. While the females place debilitating injuries in a highly feared position for themselves, the males, in thinking of the mate, seem consistently to abhor a marring of the physical image more than a disruption of the interpersonal process. In the parallel situation, however, the middle-class males' self-rankings and the females' ranking for mate are in much closer agreement. Both stress debilitating disabilities, presumably because they are similarly aware of the masculine role requirement for active participation in the occupational system. What seems to emerge from these comparisons is a cultural portrait, an idealized image of the powerful man and the beautiful woman.

Lower-class females' ranking for self and lower-class

males' ranking for the mate show remarkable consistency. It is significant that blindness, unlike the pattern found in the middle-class male sample, is placed first when a prospective mate is being considered by the lower-class male. He may tend to think of his wife as a possible economic contributor, rather than solely in terms of her attractiveness as a family representative. Further, the lower-class housewife probably has a more central work position within the family than does her middle-class counterpart, since her husband is not so likely to volunteer for domestic duties. The parallel situation again shows blindness ranking first in the estimation of the lower-class male for himself and the lower-class female for her mate. Lower-class female respondents express more apprehension about facial burns, both for themselves and their mates, than do others, and this marked concern is undoubtedly linked to differential value patterns. The widespread cosmetic orientation found in the lower classes is perhaps a more crucial element in their security system than is the case with women of other strata. While the middle class also emphasizes standards of personal attractiveness its members have access to other values of equal or greater importance. Security for the middle-class man or woman may be found in occupational achievement, intellectual or artistic attainments and other forms of endeavor.

Finally, it should be reiterated that evaluation of disability for the self displays considerably more over-all homogeneity than do those for the mate. The mate situation introduces new values, and opens up a wider range of cultural alternatives. Variability is perhaps also increased by the distance of the mate perspective from the center of the self-system. In general, consensus for the self-focused task is heightened by the fact that some disabilities, blindness for instance, cannot be ordered to a very low position. One might postulate a psychological floor under the potential scale of ratings for blindness as compared with other injuries. As a methodo-

logical note, it should be stated that the moderate magnitude of general agreement between self and mate rankings shows that the respondents took their tasks seriously. They did not unthinkingly give the same answers to both questions, but evidently reassessed the import of the five disabilities when the focus was shifted from self to mate.

### Situations

The next major segment of the questionnaire concerned a series of thirteen situations which required the subjects to relate to a blind acquaintance under differing sets of conditions. There were two possible alternative responses to each of the several situations as well as a don't know category. It was emphasized in the instructions that the sex of the blind acquaintance would be the same as that of the subject; this effectively eliminated various deference patterns associated with sex roles, and other sources of contamination which might occur in this area. For a more coherent presentation of the material the questions were regrouped and those situations which seemed to hang together were so arranged, regardless of the order in which they originally appeared in the questionnaire itself.

1. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would avoid talking about colors, paintings and sunsets as much as possible?

27 would avoid talking about them  
66 would not avoid talking about them  
11 don't know

2. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think it would be all right, as a general rule, to use the word blind in your conversation?

35 would use blind  
53 would not use blind  
16 don't know



Perhaps most apparent in the total figures above is the complete reversal between spheres of acceptable subject matter in the first situation and acceptable symbolic usage in the second. While slightly under two-thirds of the respondents would talk of sunsets, paintings and colors, a rather substantial segment, slightly more than one-quarter, would not bring these areas into the conversational flow. The HM subsample, for instance, is roughly divided with respect to this question.<sup>3</sup> The word blind, however, is actively tabooed by half the respondents, and indecision about it probably contributed heavily to the don't know category. A slight class variation can be found in the general trend and stems from the G male who is alone among the subsamples in not reversing his position in the two situations. The G male would overwhelmingly use the word blind in his conversation as well as talk of colors, paintings and sunsets.

3. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would insist on giving up your seat if there were no other seats available on the bus?

77 would give up my seat  
18 would not give up my seat  
9 don't know

5. If your blind acquaintance invited you for an ice cream soda, do you think, as a general rule, you would pay for them, even though your acquaintance insisted upon treating you?

8 would pay for them  
85 would let acquaintance pay for them  
11 don't know

6. If you were to take your blind acquaintance to the cafeteria of your school, do you think everyone would feel that your acquaintance should go to the head of the lunch

<sup>3</sup> The raw data or complete breakdown of all subsamples has been excluded within this text.

line rather than to the end, if they knew that your acquaintance were blind?

- 44 to the head of the line
- 38 to the end of the line
- 22 don't know

9. If you have a blind acquaintance who was a well-known member of an organization to which you belonged, do you think, as a general rule, that your acquaintance would be nominated for important offices that involved leadership?

- 57 would be nominated
- 22 would not be nominated
- 25 don't know

The figures in situation three are representative of deference patterns accorded the blind. Three-quarters of the respondents engage in this kind of particularistic behavior, a part of a larger frame of reference which tends to force the blinded individual into a noncomparable category. Adult relationships with children are illustrative of these forces. Particularistic patterns of this character are operative in relation to ill or crippled individuals and tend to define both status and role.

Particularistic behavior does not extend to situation five where the blinded acquaintance is apparently accorded a peer group status, comparable to other members of an adolescent subculture. Although this was an attempt to explore the impact of blindness along the dimension of giving and receiving, it is probable that the rigid structuring of the situation as presented in this question precluded the possibility of an effect in this area. An adult population would, probably, more clearly exhibit the seepage of particularistic criteria into the monetary sphere. It might be argued, for example, that sensitivity to the status implications of giving and receiving in this situation would be far greater in a

more mature population, while the adolescent might be more highly sensitized to the strictly economic gain or loss. It should be noted that three-quarters of those who would pay for them or don't know were found in the lower-class school.

In situation six, roughly half of the responses illustrate separation of the blind from the normal social universe through a positively prejudiced or particularistic approach. The H male contributes most heavily to this pattern, while the G female is alone in seeing the implications of segregation in either direction. The acts of moving a blind individual to the head of the line and of compelling a Negro to join yet another line are, of course, differently motivated. However, they are similar in their effect of producing separation and isolation. Finally, the rather large number of don't know responses may stem from the projective form in which the question was cast.

While countless barriers are met by the blind in the formal occupational structure, they are often permitted to hold strategic elected offices in legislatures, clubs and student councils. Half of the respondents in situation nine would accord their blinded acquaintance such a position. The piling up of responses in the don't know category may be based in part on an inability to frontally deny the blind even these elected offices, or perhaps based on a sheer lack of knowledge concerning the capabilities of the blind.

10. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would expect to take all the blame from the druggist, if you and your acquaintance, whom the druggist knew to be blind, were caught making a lot of racket in the drug store?

19 would expect all the blame

71 would not expect all the blame

13 don't know

1 H male omitted



13. If you were arguing with your blind acquaintance about a minor issue, and you knew you were right, do you think you would maintain your point as you would with your other acquaintances, or do you think you would just as soon let your acquaintance have the last word?

85 would maintain my point

14 would let my acquaintance have the last word

5 don't know

The attempt in situations ten and thirteen was to probe the amount of aggression that may legitimately be directed toward the blind, and the freedom accorded a blinded individual in the expression of aggression. While the questions themselves may be poorly framed, there is little evidence of an effect in this area. It is, of course, possible that expenditures of aggression among a group of adolescents would not be modified through the introduction of blindness. However, it seems more likely that a revised wording would bring forth a marked shift in the response.

12. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would have your acquaintance take hold of your arm while walking downstairs, or do think you would take hold of your acquaintance's arm?

40 would have acquaintance take hold of my arm

57 would take hold of arm of my acquaintance

7 don't know

It should be observed initially, that in taking the arm of a blinded individual the companion falls slightly to the rear, necessitating a whole series of steering and tugging movements as well as a constant flow of verbal directions. The problems of mobility are eased, however, by allowing the blinded individual to take the companion's arm, since this arrangement permits an awareness of the companion's bodily movements as he encounters curbs and stairways. But the symbolic meaning inherent in the two approaches

is of greater importance. The philosophy underlying the former approach is one of control in the situation. If the individual is defined as wholly crippled, the flow of action may be phrased as, "I've got you," rather than, "May I help you?" Lower-class respondents would tend more frequently to take the arm of their blinded acquaintance than would middle-class respondents, and the importance of this class trend is heightened when the character of blindness is considered in relation to other disabilities. Paraplegics and other injured persons having visual control undoubtedly employ sex, age and class distinctions when requesting assistance. Further, they can rigidly define areas of limitation and actively impose their own definition of the situation on persons offering help. This ability tends to reduce both the range and amount of contact with the larger society. The blind, unlike other disabled, cannot single out and solicit assistance from particular persons and they are forced into a position of accepting aid from all quarters. Their lack of control compels them to engage a broader class range than those laboring under other disabilities. The breadth of contact and its meaning for both the blinded individual and his acquaintance are important aspects of the problem.

4. If you were on friendly terms with a blind acquaintance who was wearing a pair of socks which did not match, do you think you would tell your acquaintance about it?

60 would tell  
38 would not tell  
6 don't know

11. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would avoid talking about dates and dating when your acquaintance was present?

29 would avoid talking about them  
63 would not avoid talking about them  
12 don't know

The blind must have accurate mirrors around them, in the form of discreet but honest individuals. A substantial minority of the subjects, slightly more than one-third, would not fulfill this responsive role. The GM subsample, for instance, is roughly divided on this question. Here as elsewhere, however, one needs to know the percentage of respondents who would not tell any acquaintance, blind or sighted, of his error, if the weight of the factor of blindness is to be realistically assessed. Over two-fifths of the respondents either would not tell or don't know, strongly suggesting the presence of a permissive orientation in this area.

In situation eleven, the attempt was to explore the definition of blindness in heterosexual relationships. Two-thirds of those who would avoid talking about dates and dating are found in the lower-class school.

7. If you introduced your blind acquaintance to your friends, do you think they would feel uneasy in the situation?

40 would feel uneasy  
43 would not feel uneasy  
21 don't know

8. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think you would expect your acquaintance to be just about like everybody else after you really got to know your acquaintance?

82 like everybody else  
20 not like everybody else  
2 don't know

Engaging a blinded individual generally tends to produce a spontaneous flux of emotion, and strain is often imposed upon routine interpersonal relationships. Two-fifths of the respondents state that their friends would feel uneasy in the situation, while another one-fifth do not know.

In situation eight, roughly one-fifth of the respondents feel that a blinded individual is essentially different from



others of their acquaintance. Given various egalitarian values, however, this may represent a significant proportion of the total figure.

### Agree-Disagree

The concluding major section was made up of a series of agree-disagree questions, which were constructed through an examination of the literature relating to blindness. While the questions were broken down and arranged under various categories, the decision as to their location in the presentation was often arbitrary, as the over-riding interest was in facilitating flow or exposition.

#### Their Situation Defined

1. The blind, in general, can do just about everything with very little help.

72 agree  
32 disagree

2. The blind, in general, are conscious of the fact that blindness has a disturbing effect on some other people.

93 Agree  
11 disagree

7. The blind, in general, never seem to fully grow up.

2 agree  
102 disagree

13. In general, blind people have no objections to talking about their blindness.

70 agree  
34 disagree

14. In general, the blind should have to work and support themselves as other people do.

81 agree  
22 disagree  
1 G female omitted

17. The blind, in general, spend very little time wishing they could see.

55 agree

49 disagree

24. I think that if I were blinded, I could make a pretty good adjustment to being blind.

55 agree

47 disagree

2 G males omitted

29. I think I would rather be dead than be blind.

7 agree

97 disagree

34. I think the blind, more than most people, have to put up a front, and act as though they are enjoying everything even when they are quite unhappy.

37 agree

67 disagree

When the total figures of the first question, exploring the amount of help needed by the blind, are broken down, the males in the sample are shown to be much less sure of the capacities of the blind than are the females. In heavily agreeing that the blind can do just about everything with very little help, females evidently employ a different reference group of activities than do males.

Turning to the question concerning work, slightly over three-quarters of the respondents feel that the blind should support themselves as must others in the society. The work ethic is more readily extended to include the blind by middle-class respondents, while having less force in the lower class, since slightly more than four-fifths of those who disagree with the questions stem from this category. More broadly, the question may illustrate conflict or instabilities in the status of blindness, for the role as it is traditionally

offered would not include the expectation of productive labor. Conflict will arise if the obligation is not counter-balanced by the right of blinded individuals to enter a wide range of occupations. Perhaps this imbalance of rights and obligations is characteristic of many roles in transition or marginal groupings.

Somewhat less than half of the subjects fail to grasp the significant fact that for the blind, blindness is the normal state and that they spend little of their time wishing they could see.

The compounding of the real and imagined difficulties thought to inhere in blindness reaches proportions where a preference for death is sometimes voiced. Six of the seven persons reacting in this manner come from the lower class.

Finally, lower-class males, unlike the other subsamples, tend to agree with the conception that the blind have to put up a front and act as though they are enjoying everything even when they are quite unhappy.

### Lack of Knowledge

31. I think when you come right down to it, almost everything a blind person can do is really amazing.

74 agree  
30 disagree

35. I think most people just don't know how the blind manage many of the things they do.

100 agree  
4 disagree

A sheer lack of knowledge concerning the blind is of equal or greater importance than those more structured attitudes adhering in the stereotype, and interaction with the blind is customarily marked by an amorphous quality reflecting this lack. Few people fully understand the blinded individual's social position. For large segments of the society,



the area of blindness remains a void in the pattern of meaning customarily imposed on the social fabric. With the lone exception of the GM subsample, all samples tend to agree with the statement concerning amazement. The reaction reminds one of Dr. Johnson's reply when invited by Boswell to give his opinion of a woman preaching: "Sir, it is like a dog walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

### Compensation

5. The blind, in general, can hear fainter sounds than most other people.

91 agree  
12 disagree  
1 H male omitted

8. The blind, in general, like other people, do not have a sixth sense.

52 agree  
50 disagree  
1 H male omitted  
1 G female omitted

10. The blind, in general, seem to have a special spiritual quality.

59 agree  
44 disagree  
1 G female omitted

11. The blind, in general, get a more accurate first impression of others than most people do.

77 agree  
27 disagree

16. The blind, in general, are somehow given at least one really outstanding gift like musical talent as compensation.

51 agree  
52 disagree  
1 G male omitted

18. The blind, in general, are more cheerful than most other people.

35 agree

68 disagree

1 G male omitted

The assumption that the blind can hear fainter sounds than can others is widespread, while half the respondents feel the blind have a sixth sense. It is striking that more middle-class respondents feel that the blind have a sixth sense than do lower-class respondents. Perhaps, in certain limited sectors, middle-class students display a greater knowledge or awareness of various cultural conceptions.

Slightly less than three-fifths of the respondents attribute a spiritual quality to the blind, while slightly less than three-quarters feel that the blind form a more accurate first impression than do others. Females generally contribute heavily to the assertion that the blind have a special spiritual quality, with lower-class males offering further support to this concept.

The belief in compensation in terms of a specific talent, such as musical ability, is clearly related to class factors, since the lower class contributes heavily to the agree category.

One of the apparent contradictions associated with the stereotype of the blind is the assertion that the blind are often more cheerful than others. A third of the respondents feel this to be true.

#### Permissiveness

26. I think if the blind are concerned only with their personal problems, and not those of others, it should be overlooked because of their blindness.

28 agree

76 disagree

32. I think if the blind become angry with people over little things, it should be overlooked because of their blindness.

33 agree  
71 disagree

36. I think you must have to make an awful lot of exceptions for even successful blind people.

32 agree  
70 disagree  
1 H female omitted  
1 G male omitted

40. I think that if blind people are demanding of others, it should be overlooked because of their blindness.

27 agree  
77 disagree

42. I think you must have to do a lot of play-acting when you are around the blind to make them feel that they are normal.

16 agree  
87 disagree  
1 G male omitted

46. I think if the blind are often late for appointments it should be overlooked because of their blindness.

54 agree  
48 disagree  
1 G male omitted  
1 G female omitted

Generally, slightly less than a third of the sample would extend certain privileges to the blind in interpersonal relationships. The two exceptions concern play-acting, where slightly more than four-fifths of the sample would not modify their behavior, and the promptness of keeping appointments, where slightly more than half would make some allowance for a blind person's tardiness.



Lower-class males roughly divide their responses to the questions concerning anger and exceptions, while the remaining subsamples display clear agreement in the direction of their response. Further, lower-class males tend to agree that lateness for appointments should be overlooked, while the remaining subsamples are roughly divided in their response to this question.

It should be observed that in both the situations and the agree-disagree questions, the subjects generally tend to contribute a great many supportive responses, while giving far fewer permissive responses. Roughly four-fifths of the respondents would give up their seats in a crowded bus, for instance, while slightly less than one-third of the subjects would overlook anger in a blinded individual. Other questions illustrating these two dimensions tend to follow this general pattern.

### Negative Implications

6. The blind, in general, are capable of being meaner than most other people.

2 agree  
102 disagree

15. The blind, in general, care less about their personal appearance than other people do.

5 agree  
99 disagree

20. In general, the blind are more irritable than most other people.

6 agree  
98 disagree

22. I think some blind people are blind because they are being punished for something they have done.

9 agree  
95 disagree

25. I think that most little children would not feel there is anything frightening about a blind person.

80 agree

24 disagree

38. I think most people would feel there is nothing repugnant about the blind.

82 agree

22 disagree

The first three questions reveal little evidence about certain negative attributes often imputed to the blind. Slightly more support is found for the attitude concerning punishment, while there is even greater certainty about the frightening aspect of blindness. Together with other factors, the projective form in which this question was cast might have allowed the respondents to contribute more heavily to a category which tends to place the blind in a negative context. This possibility would also be true for the question concerning repugnance. While in a minority, the number of disagree responses found here is rather higher than expected. Apparently it is difficult to speak ill of the blind just as it is of the dead.

### Segregation and Avoidance

4. In general, the blind prefer being alone much of the time.

14 agree

90 disagree

9. The blind, in general, have a whole set of feelings which cannot be understood by most other people.

50 agree

54 disagree

12. The blind, in general, would probably be unhappy if they had a separate community of their own.

89 agree

15 disagree

19. In general, the blind seem to fall into two separate groups; either they can't do much of anything, or they do almost everything surprisingly well.

41 agree  
63 disagree

21. The blind, in general, prefer other blind people for friends.

15 agree  
89 disagree

23. I think I would prepare myself to meet a really different sort of person, if I were told I was soon going to meet someone who was blind.

24 agree  
80 disagree

28. I think if I were blinded I could make as many real friends as I do now.

75 agree  
29 disagree

30. I think that if I met a blind person, I could carry on a conversation quite easily.

80 agree  
24 disagree

37. I think I would just as soon avoid blind people, if it could be done without hurting anyone's feelings.

23 agree  
80 disagree  
1 G male omitted

41. I think the blind are more like other people in general than they are like each other.

81 agree  
21 disagree  
1 G male omitted  
1 G female omitted



43. I think that in talking with blind persons I would feel self-conscious when I realized that they did not know what I looked like.

17 agree

86 disagree

1 G male omitted

44. I think the blind live in a world of their own.

28 agree

75 disagree

1 G male omitted

45. I think somebody who knows something about the blind, and can see, should be with them most of the time.

68 agree

35 disagree

1 G male omitted

Much like many of the others, question nine might well have been placed in any of several categories, since its implications flow in many directions. However, an assumed inability on the part of half the respondents to fully understand the feelings of the blind has an obvious relationship to segregation and avoidance. Lower-class males, it should be observed, agree with this question to a greater extent than any of the remaining subsamples.

The three questions concerning preference for remaining alone, a separate community, and other blind for friends, indicate little desire on the part of the respondents to segregate the blind overtly in a manner characteristic of other minority groupings.

The question concerning the need for a sighted companion, however, reflects among other things a desire for a competent mediator as well as an implied lack of capacity. The middle-class male divides his response to this question, while the responses of the remaining subsamples clearly indicate an assumed need for a companion.

The question of categorizing the blind into two separate groups was an attempt to get at the "beggar-genius" polarity attributed to the stereotype of the blind, and also has implications for authoritarian personality structures. Lower-class females display marked agreement with the question.

The remaining questions have their primary impact along the acceptance-rejection dimension.

### Status

3. The blind, in general, do not feel themselves to be inferior to most other people.

63 agree  
41 disagree

39. I think most people feel generally superior to the blind.

46 agree  
57 disagree  
1 G male omitted

While it is important that slightly more than two-fifths of the respondents believe most people feel superior to the blind, it is of greater interest that slightly less than two-fifths believe that the blind themselves feel inferior to most other people. This definition of the status situation implies that much of the action directed toward the blind will have a downward flow, and will be legitimized by the assumption that the blind themselves feel inferior.

A slight class differential appears in question three, with the middle class tending to assert more strongly than the lower class that the blind themselves do not feel inferior. A further interesting result is found in question thirty-nine, where all samples roughly divide their response regarding feelings of superiority with the single exception of the lower-class female, who tends markedly to dispute the assertion of superiority.



## Visibility

27. I think most people would not watch a blind person if one walked down the street.

40 agree

64 disagree

33. I think, if I had to guess, I would say that there are many more blind men than women.

75 agree

28 disagree

1 G male omitted

Unlike the situation in other forms of disability, there are no barriers to watching a blinded individual, and the interest evoked by blindness sharply marks the blind off from others in the street scene. It is interesting that the middle-class male divides his response to this question while the remaining subsamples clearly indicate that most people would watch a blind person walking down the street. With regard to the following question, it should be stated that the distribution of blindness between the sexes is roughly equal. However, the weighting of the response probably indicates an effect stemming from the stereotype of the blind. Not only is the image of the blind beggar customarily a male figure, but there is some evidence that the female blind impose a self-segregation or utilize a companion when travel is necessary, thus reducing their degree of visibility.

## Discussion

It might be emphasized, initially, that the questionnaire was designed primarily for purposes of exploration. The major effort was directed toward feeling out various sensitive areas within the constellation of attitudes concerning the blind, rather than to a rigorous testing of propositions or the collection of definitive substantive data. Further analysis in the field would, of course, necessitate a drastic



reworking of the questionnaire, the elimination of certain inadequacies, and the inclusion of samples more nearly representative of the larger society.

Several possible variations of this approach suggest themselves. For instance, future questionnaires might try to attack the problem with a finer grained design, attempting to isolate more subtle gradations of attitude in an adult population. Special attention should perhaps be given to the language of alternative responses, since slight linguistic variation is so often a clue to significant differences of orientation.

Another approach to the investigation of the stereotypical structure might aim at eliciting a continuum of response to the blind among various age and sex groups, or among a variety of subcultures. One could, for example, administer a questionnaire to young children, adolescents and adults, focusing attention on the degree of adherence to the stereotype at successive age levels. Evidence now available indicates that the response to the blind is in large measure learned behavior, and this aspect of the problem could be studied, particularly if a way might be found to take into account the amount of direct contact with the blind which the respondents had experienced.

As here set forth, however, certain statements of a generalized character may be made in relation to the situational and agree-disagree questions. The emerging patterns stem from a comparison of the responses found in each of the several subcategories, cross-cutting the questionnaire. It must be emphasized again that these generalizations extend only to a limited population of high school seniors.

There is a marked tendency on the part of lower-class males to portray the position of the blind in terms of a traditional orientation, and reaction takes place within this general framework. The focus is on a wide range of assumed limitation imposed by the disability, as well as various stereotypical conceptions. Further, lower-class males

attempt to fill this void through the introduction of particularistic reactions which lend support to those thought largely incapable of functioning within the normative social structure. Many responses in both the situations and agree-disagree questions illustrate this pattern.

The orientation displayed by middle-class males is equally striking in quite another direction. Their responses are marked by an apparent sophistication, which seems to let them relate to the blind in much the same fashion as they would relate to the noninjured. While they adhere to some features of the stereotype, most of those having negative implications are strongly rejected. Again, middle-class males consistently exhibit less need to introduce particularistic or supportive behavior in their reactions to the several relevant areas. Some doubt as to the depth of this orientation might be found, however, in their response to the following situations. While all the other subsamples are in clear agreement that almost everything a blind person can do is really amazing, that most people would watch a blind person walking down a street, and that they would tell a blind person of his error in mismatching a pair of socks, middle-class males are uniformly divided in their answers to these questions.

The reactions may indicate that the sophistication displayed elsewhere, as in their ability to use the word, "blindness," or to talk with the blind about colors, paintings and sunsets, is something of a surface phenomenon. On the other hand, it suggests an honest ambivalence in which these individuals are genuinely straining toward a reciprocally grounded view of the blind, but have not overcome all stereotypical elements.

The latter orientation may also be paralleled by an attempt on their part to consciously order their responses in a manner which clearly reflects middle-class humanitarian values. They may have seen through the questionnaire and responded to it as one does to an examination, thus tending to cloak underlying attitudes and beliefs. While question-



naires can only suggest orientations of this sort, they are not without significance, for such mixed responses may well characterize the interpersonal flow itself.

Lower-class females tend to display a pattern similar to that presented for the lower-class males, with certain variations. There is a slight tendency to exhibit less permissiveness than do lower-class males, as may be seen in the question concerning the blinded individual's expression of anger over little things. Lower-class males would overlook such expressions to a far greater degree than would lower-class females. Further variations on the pattern may be found in the question concerning the superiority of most individuals to the blind. Lower-class females, in contrast to lower-class males, assert strongly that most people do not feel generally superior to the blind.

Middle-class females exhibit a pattern varying only slightly from that characterizing middle-class males. Sex differences are not as apparent in the middle-class groups as they are in the lower-class groups. In their response, however, middle-class females displayed greater consistency than did middle-class males. Apparently they were less fettered by conscious concerns or more open in their response to the task.

Throughout, class distinctions served as a major key to the examination of differential patterns of orientation and response. Social class variations among females are roughly the same as the distinctions described for the lower-class male and the middle-class male. But these differences tend to become blurred or grow less sharp within the female grouping.

Little difference was found in the orientations of the two sexes. The two exceptions to this statement concern the assertions that the blind have a special spiritual quality, and that they can do just about everything with very little help. Females, generally, agreed heavily with these assertions.



## CHAPTER V

### Strain and Accommodation in the Role of the Blind

The usual approach to individuals as a series of unique personalities has been replaced in this analysis by a discussion in terms of the recurrent patterns of interpersonal relations. The matrix of expectations confronting the individual and shared by him, affords the major key to the exploration of patterned human relationships. The concept of role is the core mechanism for describing and analyzing these interactive patterns. Role theory has been employed extensively throughout the behavioral sciences, lending an interpretive context to such concepts as the stereotype, the social self, and the socialization process. A framework of role theory is also central to an understanding of change, conflict, deviance and abnormality. The perspective is fundamental to the analysis of the structure and functioning of large-scale social systems and of various subsystems within the larger collectivity. Finally, the concept of role has been coupled with that of ego, and the two have gradually emerged as primary supports of the conceptual bridge between sociology and psychology. James, Mead and Cooley are perhaps chief among those who shaped the idea of role in its early development, while later significant contributions have been made by Parsons, Merton and Davis. However, the most widely accepted formulation is probably that of Linton and the following discussion will be oriented toward his basic framework.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A variety of authors have also contributed to the present analysis. But for reasons of clarity and presentation, certain references have been omitted. The serious scholar must turn to The Selected Bibliography which is literally strewn with the contributions of role theorists. Ralph Linton, "Concepts of Role and Status," in T. M. Newcomb and E. L. Hartley, *Readings in Social Psychology*, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1947, pp. 367-370.

Role theory is perhaps most often approached through a discussion of status hierarchies. Status may refer to the general position an individual occupies in the larger society, or it may be specified to refer to the various places he holds in more limited systems of interaction. Roles are then linked to the individual's several statuses, and their representation in overt behavior constitutes the dynamic aspect of these positions, establishing rights and obligations with reference to other persons. A right represents a legitimate expectation held by an individual in one position regarding the behavior of an individual in a related position. From the other's point of view this claim represents an obligation. Rights and obligations, then, emerge as differing definitions of the same fundamental relationship. These shared social norms serve to bridge the gap between the two positions and define the minimal components of a role to which its incumbent must adhere. They also define the sanctions to be employed by persons in counter roles when a role incumbent fails to meet legitimate expectations. The concept is essentially relative and complementary, and is meaningful only in terms of a dynamic interplay between polar positions. It involves the acting out of status in accordance with culturally defined ideal patterns of behavior. One's own actions tend to be anticipated by others, while the reactions of others tend in turn to be predictable.

Roles serve integrative functions and help to define the collaborative tasks necessary to the maintenance of society. They also provide a framework for recruitment and enable the individual to evaluate others in a systematic and orderly fashion. By defining boundaries, they provide the role incumbent with a stable conception of the self and offer him orientation for his activities. The integration of roles lends stability to routine human relations and facilitates the individual's rapid movement among varieties of interpersonal setting. Because role formulations specify legitimate sanc-



tions, they afford a basis of social control and when sanctions are invoked, they tend to bring those who deviate back toward approved societal norms. It will be apparent that without this framework of normative orientation, every casual encounter would be transformed into a mountainous chore. The interpersonal process would be awash with uncertainty. Each situation would require the elaboration of ground rules as to one's own actions and the actions of others.

While all societies order human relationships in terms of status hierarchies, they differ sharply in the complexity of the hierarchies and in the types of status singled out for primary recognition. The master or key status may be occupational or economic, as in American culture, or may be geared to religious or kinship criteria as in certain other cultures. The status and role in terms of which the individual is operating at a given time are commonly termed active, while his other statuses and roles, held in abeyance, are termed latent. The latent, temporarily inoperative statuses constitute an important part of the individual's fund of social knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Roles are learned through a process of identification with or imitation of those persons who serve as role models. The process may be vicarious as when a child selects a hero from literature for emulation, or it may be overt as when a son follows in the footsteps of his father. Childhood play permits a wide range of experience and serves to acquaint the child with the various perspectives of all those individuals he pretends to be. "Each child finds out, in each role he plays, what he can look for in the behavior of children playing dominant, dependent, or other reciprocal roles, and what he must do to meet, accept, resist, or evade others' demands in those roles."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the social facets of person-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Norman Cameron, *The Psychology of Behavior Disorders*, Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1948, p. 92.



ality are molded by exposure to the various roles with which the individual comes in contact, not by an abstract culture as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Individuals possess multiple statuses at any one time and also at different times throughout the course of their lives. For instance, one might be a male, a student, a schizophrenic and a roommate concurrently while being adolescent, adult and aged consecutively. Statuses held concurrently are usually adapted to one another, or insulated in terms of time and place, minimizing the possibility of conflict. Conflict appears, however, when two or more of the individuals' several statuses require opposed forms of behavior. The factory foreman, for instance, may be so placed that he cannot fully or realistically meet the demands of both labor and management. If both sets of conflicting expectations have validity for him, confusion or anxiety will arise in a variety of interpersonal situations.

Consecutive statuses, too, are usually arranged in a way least likely to involve strain. There are, however, discontinuities in cultural conditioning, as in the very different behavior required of an individual who moves from the status of son to the status of father.<sup>5</sup> Further, the arbitrary character of certain ascribed statuses offers no guarantee that the assigned role will be wholly followed or entirely compatible with the personality. Mannish women and feminine men are familiar examples.

Roles and statuses, of course, vary a great deal in the clarity with which they are defined and in the consistency with which they are carried out. Military organization illustrates the extreme case where behavior is highly formalized, procedures specified and human relations ordered to a

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Linton, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Benedict, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Cultural Conditioning," in Kluckhohn, Murray and Schneider, *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1953, pp. 522-531.

strict hierarchy. Here individuals are readily identified because status and role are exactly symbolized by dress. Still another example might be the sharply defined patterns evolved by whites and Negroes in the South. Behavior has been firmly set and the tendency on both sides of the relationship is to treat persons as occupants of a certain status rather than as individuals. At the other extreme one might select the mulatto, the second generation American or the partially seeing. Here statuses are ill-defined and role boundaries are fluid. Yet no matter how ambiguous the status accorded an individual by his society, the corresponding role must be recognized and learned. Statuses and their associated behaviors vary in degree of stability, and when they change it is as part of broader cultural movement. Compare, for instance, the status accorded a physician some few centuries ago with his present position in the prestige hierarchy. Shifts in pattern may also be seen in much more limited time periods, especially in societies characterized by the rapid vertical and horizontal movement of individuals.

There is a broad area of interest concerning the relationship of the ego to its several roles, and the focus may be upon regulative social processes as well as various problems of adjustment. Socialization and the development of a consistent self-portrait are dependent on the individual's active acceptance of a series of roughly integrated and stable role configurations. As new statuses are woven into the individual's repertory, they require the development of new response patterns. "In attempting to take a role for which he lacks certain behavior equipments, an individual in any given culture may appear incongruous and even psychopathic. One example from our culture is that of the *nouveau riche*."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Theodore R. Sarbin, "The Concept of Role Taking," *Sociometry*, Vol. VI, No. 3, August, 1937, p. 275.



Varying degrees of deviation are permitted to the occupants of roles, and to a certain extent, individuals can color or affect their statuses as well as being molded by them. When nonconformity has reached a certain boundary, however, others who are directly concerned will impose sanctions in an attempt to control this behavior. For the individual to operate effectively, his conception of his statuses and roles must be similar to what society expects of him. Some types of deviation, however, may result in a restructuring of group norms and these new patterns will then serve as referents for the evaluation of the individual's actions. Still other deviations may be met by a collective reaction which brings the individual back into line and reinforces the prevailing structure. In extreme conditions deviation may be of such magnitude that the group itself is dissolved.<sup>7</sup>

Role analysis can be approached through focusing upon one of the roles involved in the system of action and reaction. The role of the blinded individual can be taken as a point of reference and various aspects of the role can be pieced together to form an ideal-type relational pattern, a model in its definition of situations. The construct, or ideal role, is built up by sifting the constellation of norms which characterize society's reaction to the blind, and this pure type affords a yardstick for measuring the individual's role performance. It serves as a point of comparison with other roles and as a general framework for understanding behavior. Expectations concerning the role are displayed in the flow of interpersonal relations, defining the actions of the blinded individual as well as the actions of those who engage him.

The blinded individual's essential dependence and his

<sup>7</sup> Florian Znaniecki, "Social Groups as Products of Participating Individuals," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLIV, 1939, pp. 799-801.



claim to solicitous, guiding and supportive behavior from those who comprise his social environment is central in the role expectations. In turn, the blinded individual accepts his dependence and avails himself of the support commonly offered. The limitations and presumed magnitude of the disability are thought to be so overwhelming, and the struggle so uneven, that the blind are placed outside the game of life. Believed incapable of socially useful activity, they are assigned to a privileged sanctuary or role at the boundaries of the game. The picture is presented in its most extreme form by Himes: "A cautious, timid, defeated man with the cards stacked against him from the outset and whipped daily by life in a world of seeing people, he has retired from the struggle and surrendered to useless dependency."<sup>8</sup>

The role is customarily subordinate to other social roles and the flow of action follows a downward course. While a blinded individual may be permitted to dominate a conversation, the permission to dominate rather than the raw fact of domination is the true mark of his lesser status. Similarly, the deference usually shown the blind is more akin to condescension than to the deference accorded those who are felt to be superior. The marked overevaluation of certain routine actions can also be interpreted in terms of the special peripheral status assigned to the blind. The blind are not expected to compete successfully in the formal occupational structure, and even limited achievements are often considered newsworthy. Expectations concerning their ambitions, when thought of at all, may be placed in a sheltered context commensurate with the assumed limitations of their position. Little true autonomy of action is granted, and a submissive passivity keynotes the interpersonal process.

Sighted persons feel an obligation to protect the blinded

<sup>8</sup> Joseph S. Himes, Jr., "Some Concepts of Blindness in American Culture," in *Attitudes Toward Blindness*, New York, American Foundation for the Blind, Social Research Series No. 1, 1951, pp. 10-22.

individual from some of life's harshness and insecurity. In some respects the role is similar to that of the child or the mentally ill, who merit tolerance and good-natured support but are denied the dignity of basically reciprocal relationships to their enviroing figures. In another parallel sense the blind are distinguished by preferential treatment which reverses many of our cultural norms, and carries with it a heavily patronizing flavor. Thus in a culture dedicated to personal achievement, the blind are arbitrarily assigned an unearned and often unwanted status. In a society distinguished by its penchant for equality and uniform application of the rules of the game, the blind are judged by unique criteria. They are cloaked in the diffuse role of "poor blind man" rather than met in the specific role costume appropriate to the action of the moment.

Rejection of the blind may be overt or covert, with covert rejection often taking the form of pity. Pity is a prominent aspect of the relationship and the perspective from which the role is frequently engaged. It is further expected that the attitudes of the blinded individual toward his role will roughly complement those held in the larger society. The blind are often thought to be characterized by a profound melancholy, and manifestations of playfulness or humor may be interpreted as simply evidence of a profound courage. The blind themselves are believed to be keenly and continuously aware of their deplorable state. Their essential helplessness legitimizes their claim to protection and sympathy, and they are expected to avail themselves gratefully of the aid and support that is so abundantly meted out.

While there is an anticipation that many of the major and sometimes burdensome responsibilities of life will not be shouldered by the blind, it is fully balanced by the assumption that the blind can scrape little if any pleasure from this world. The rights or facilities permitted to the



role are freely given and while these rights have enormous scope, the position remains unenviable. Among others, Cutsforth has recognized the basic complementarity of expectations which marks the reciprocal roles of blind and sighted. "The blind, like other frustrated personalities, trade the birthright of self-assurance that goes with aggressive action, the courage that goes with anger, and the audacity that goes with rage for ineffectual action, compliant passivity, and the self-contempt of a dependent."<sup>9</sup>

It should be stressed that only selected sectors of the role have been chalked out for emphasis and that the degree of clarity or institutionalization of the blind position has not been dealt with. A fully institutionalized role emerges when certain of the individual's needs are given expression through and mesh with the patterns of expectations which make up the role. His actions will proceed not only in terms of these internalized expectations but will also be contingent upon the possible reactions or expectations of others. These reactions tend to reward him positively when his behavior is in essential conformity with the role appropriate to a specific interactive context. The role, then, is built upon various internalized needs expressed in action which must be geared in with the responses of occupants of reciprocally oriented positions.<sup>10</sup>

This neatness of fit is characteristic only of the most highly institutionalized roles and will serve as a backdrop for the examination of the specific situation confronting the blind. The discussion will focus initially upon the matrix of attitudes and expectations. Then shifting to the blind themselves the role will be seen as it is defined and learned, while in a final section certain implications having a more

<sup>9</sup> Thomas D. Cutsforth, "Personality and Social Adjustment Among the Blind," in Paul A. Zahl, *Blindness*, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 180.

<sup>10</sup> The orientation adopted here is essentially that of Talcott Parsons, in *The Social System*, Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1951.



psychological character will be explored. The three areas, expectations, subjective definitions and psychological consequences, are intimately linked. Each is involved in each, and the discussion will only roughly parallel the broader outline. Throughout, the emphasis will be upon structured strain, structured in the sense that it stems directly from defective institutionalization.

The role of the blind was most clearly drawn in medieval Europe and was legitimized or institutionalized by the Church. The blind were given sole rights for the sale of various amulets and the chanting of certain prayers. As beggars, they were stationed at cathedral doors and many wore distinctive dress symbolizing their blindness. Since then, however, there has been a constant chipping away at various role components, and the pace has been dramatically accelerated following the last two wars. There remains, nevertheless, a core of expectations concerning the status of the blind which are overlaid with stereotypical patterns or beliefs. These expectations leave the blind in an essentially peripheral or marginal position.

Discussions of marginality are customarily focused on the individual who has acquired cultural or subcultural definitions of his situation which contrast sharply with the definitions acquired in the newer or broader culture. The immigrant, for instance, is marginal in the sense that he partakes of two cultural configurations, while the Negro is marginal in the sense that he has been ordered to the periphery of the social structure and certain core societal values are distorted in their application or rarely applied. The conflict or discrepancy of value structures is often reflected in the personalities of individuals, and these hybrids or marginal men may be characterized by ambivalence, inferiority, hypersensitivity and compensation reactions.<sup>11</sup> The greatest

<sup>11</sup> Arnold W. Green, "A Re-examination of the Marginal Man Concept," *Social Forces*, Vol. XXVI, Dec. 1947, pp. 167-171.

stress falls upon those who have reached a midpoint in their transition between the two value configurations, or upon those who have deeply internalized dominant societal values but face insurmountable barriers in their complete enactment. Oddly enough, categorical rejection may be easier to bear than grudging, vacillating or spasmodic acceptance. Jews, for example, tend to exhibit the classical symptoms of the marginal man to a much greater degree than do most southern Negroes.<sup>12</sup> While the blind are confronted with what might be called positive rather than negative prejudice, it is apparent that they have been ordered to a peripheral position and are marginal in the sense that they are subject to a restricted set of social norms. The more active among them and those who participated in the values of the dominant culture as noninjured individuals will tend to exhibit greater strain than those who passively accept the new definition of their situation. Marginality of this order does not imply complete malintegration of societal values, since the blind do in fact lack certain facilities required for performance in terms of the broader value standards. There are certain intrinsic losses which no amount of rehabilitation can assuage, and these will necessarily have their impact on the interactive process. Certain other losses, however, stem directly from a lag in society's definition of the blinded individual's status, which does not fully take into account his present level of competence.

The more active blind find themselves in constant opposition to these social definitions, and it is always problematic which of the behavioral possibilities will gain sway. Situations are often so structured that even these more active blind persons are forced to submit to the definitions held in the larger society. In illustration, a blinded individual may with much effort reduce the limitations of the handicap, shoulder most of the obligations incumbent upon

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



a noninjured individual and conduct himself in a manner approaching that of the sighted. Yet in a specific encounter, such as boarding a bus, the driver may confront him with, "That's okay, buddy, you don't have to pay." Other passengers are crowding in behind him; his protests are met with, "No, no, you keep it," and the situational pressures are such that this is no time to attempt a change in the driver's fund of social knowledge. In these and similar instances, involving a clash between the blinded individual's definition of his role and the definition held in the larger society, the situation is so structured that the latter will prove to be the stronger force. "Did you ever consider what blindness meant? To be dependent on others' charity, to be a burden, a maimed thing? Above all, to have to submit to pity, when you were born with a spirit that wanted the envy of other men!"<sup>13</sup>

This leads into a slightly different dimension of defective institutionalization which concerns the clarity or stability of social definitions.<sup>14</sup> It will be recalled that although all roles undergo changes in content, the rate and direction of change vary sharply. At any time, certain roles will be emerging and gradually will gain solidity of definition, while others will be breaking down and may eventually disappear as meaningful social categories. These roles in transition lack clarity, or fail to provide explicit definitions of action in a wide range of social situations. The status of the blind has undergone marked changes over a relatively brief time segment, and the role itself exhibits haziness, since individuals have to some extent thrown off traditional ways

<sup>13</sup> Victoria Mary Sackville-West, *The Dragon in Shallow Waters*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922, p. 258.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Irving Wardwell, *Social Strain and Social Adjustment in the Marginal Role of the Chiropractor*, Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, February, 1951. It should be observed that Wardwell's analysis of the marginal role of the chiropractor offered a number of stimulating points of comparison as well as contrast, and aided in the organization of the present discussion.



of relating to the blind without completely filling in these social voids. Engaging the blind is much like picking up a menu in a French restaurant. One recognizes some things, not others, and in responding to it, one is never really sure what he is going to get.

The more active blind are confronted by both dimensions of marginality or status instability, since they have in large part rejected the societal definition and forged ahead into social areas previously closed to them or thought beyond their reach. In doing so they have realigned their cluster of statuses so that they are left unsupported by the forms of their society. The appearance of these new kinds of persons in established social positions implies a status contradiction and may create status dilemmas for the blind individuals concerned as well as for those who engage them.<sup>15</sup> These individuals enter the new areas lacking certain expected characteristics and bringing status definitions which have previously been activated under radically different conditions or in remote contexts. For instance, the blinded individual who becomes an insurance broker enters this occupational role burdened with a master status which tends to overwhelm or markedly color other statuses within his repertory. Those who engage him in his professional role are caught up in a subtle but disquieting conflict, relating to him both as blind man and man of business. Sales transactions might be characterized by cold self-interest or by some degree of thinly disguised charity. Moreover, for the blinded individual there is often the correlative problem of which status to activate in a given situation without blatantly disrupting the balance of privileges and obligations. Many of these decisions are relatively clean-cut and

<sup>15</sup> Everett C. Hughes, "Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. L, 1944-45, p. 357. The following material was taken directly from the analysis offered by Hughes, and while slightly modified to permit an exploration of blindness, it essentially restates his position.

readily made. He cannot, for example, actively solicit sympathy or employ his blindness as a lever in the sales transaction itself. However, other situations may arise which have a less definitive character and which demand decisions of the greatest complexity. If the discussions are broken off for lunch, for instance, who is to pick up the check? Is the decision to be made in terms of his role as salesman or in terms of his master status?

Thus the more active blind often find themselves caught up in undefined social enclaves, and insofar as they must continually meet these dilemmas or appear as contradictions to those who engage them, they are in a marginal position.

Defective institutionalization may be seen again in the role as it is defined and learned by the newly blinded. An earlier discussion has sketched in some of the crucial features of the military hospital and portrayed the general atmosphere prevailing in the wards. In this setting orientation personnel were conceived of as agents of socialization in the partial reintegration of disabled individuals into the larger society. It is of the greatest significance that the introduction to the role occurs in the hospital under the tutelage of highly trained workers rather than in the family. Very generally, the family would tend to flood the situation with emotion and react, initially at least, in an overpermissive, sympathetic manner, smothering any efforts to achieve independence or a more active adjustment.

The community's reaction may also be characterized by an overflow of emotion, under the double impress of war-time enthusiasm and pity for the injured. Commonplace in this period were news articles like the following: "BLIND MARINE HERO MAY GET HOME, A drive to purchase a completely furnished home for Corporal William Johnson, 21-year-old blind Marine, and his bride of two days was started in nearby Baltimore yesterday. Mary Anne Dodge of Pittsburgh convinced Johnson, blinded in both



eyes while fighting overseas, that she was 'lucky to be able to marry the man I love' in spite of his handicap." Again, "HIS NEIGHBORS CHIP IN TO AID BLIND SOLDIER, Sergeant James R. Lawrence, twenty-three, knows residents of Essex County have a heart. The community, by voluntary contributions, raised \$21,762.33 for Sergeant Lawrence, who lost the sight of both eyes during the Battle of the Bulge when German rifle fire ripped up his face. Removal of bullets also necessitated the amputation of his nose. The money will be used to provide a completely furnished home for the silver-star decorated sergeant and his wife, buy a seeing-eye dog, and establish a trust fund for permanent upkeep of the home. Sergeant Lawrence is a patient at Valley Forge General Hospital, Phoenixville, Pa."<sup>16</sup>

Within the hospital, however, rewards and sanctions are organized around a definition which diverges sharply from that found in the larger society. Independence and autonomy are stressed. The blinded individual is not simply judged in relation to other blind but must meet certain broad standards applicable to all. To a limited extent, role models were provided by older ward occupants who aided the more recently blinded individual in his adjustment to ward and role, thus reinforcing the efforts of the staff. The situation was so structured that the prevailing tone was set by orientation personnel, and it was this definition that gradually gained sway. In building a role for this segment of the blind population the aim of the orientation staff was apparently to move the blinded individual into behavioral patterns having maximal congruence with those of sighted individuals. They not only attempted to push the intrinsic limitations of blindness to an irreducible minimum but also rewarded those blinded persons whose general bearing was

<sup>16</sup> In the above quotations, the various names and places have been changed for reasons of discretion.



most akin to that of the noninjured. Much stress, for instance, was laid upon appropriate bodily movement such as turning the head and looking directly toward others while in conversation. In so doing, however, they inadvertently emphasized the discrepancy between the blinded individual's definition of his own role and the definition held in the larger society.

In responding to the rehabilitation setting, the more active blind tend to set their goals and expectations much the same way as the noninjured. Outside hospital walls, however, their social world contains barriers which severely limit the possibility of attaining these goals, and more restricted achievements generate frustration and anxiety. The blind person schooled to a more active role exhibits trained incapacity to play out the passively stereotyped model. Cutsforth highlights the problem in the following graphic form. "Perhaps this is a question that only a fool would ask. But is it not conceivable that we might possibly rehabilitate a blind person to the point where not only his objective happiness but also his health might be jeopardized?"<sup>17</sup>

The process of re-entering the larger society is accomplished sporadically as furloughs and passes bring the blind veteran into contact with family and friends. These initial forays give him his first taste of his newly acquired social position and they constitute the first steps in the acquisition of a role repertory which has blindness as the master status. It is a period of critical strain, heightened by the tension between the role found within the hospital ward and the role found outside. This discontinuity of role sequence has important implications for the rehabilitation process as well as for the level of reintegration that is ultimately to be achieved. Perhaps the most serious failure of the rehabilitation program can be found in this area, since there was little

<sup>17</sup> Thomas D. Cutsforth, "Blindness as an Adequate Expression of Anxiety," *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind*, 1939, p. 115.

in the way of anticipatory training to facilitate the transition from the role found in the ward to the broader social role. It would have been possible to minimize this break by preparing the individual for the wholly new onslaught of attitudes and reactions offered by friends, family and the general public.

Still another aspect of role definition concerns the extent of the individual's conformity to a previously accepted behavioral pattern. The recently blinded individual, of course, brings to the rehabilitation setting a fully crystallized personality structure, a modal life orientation, which has been built up as a noninjured member of society. His perception of self and his definition of a drastically new status role alignment will be colored by a previously acquired fund of social knowledge. This knowledge includes the stereotype of the blind. As Cutsforth points out, "In the case of the adult, the attitudes already have been acquired in large part prior to the loss of sight. They are his own social attitudes inflicted upon himself—the attitudes he has previously expressed toward others in a similar condition."<sup>18</sup> One goal of the rehabilitation setting should be the systematic destruction of this stereotype.

Finally, defective institutionalization may be seen from the perspective of the individual, as the conflicting social forces reflect back upon his personality structure. The sudden introduction of blindness implies that the individual must drastically modify his body image, his larger portrait of self and his habitual modes of relating to others. He must somehow meet the dramatic shift in the surrounding patterns of attitudes and expectations. As was indicated earlier, the more assertive blind tend to reject the traditional paths for self-expression provided by the culture. For these paths not only obstruct the fulfillment of certain needs developed

<sup>18</sup> Thomas D. Cutsforth, "Personality and Social Adjustment Among the Blind," *op. cit.*, pp. 175-176.



long before the injury, but to follow them would tend to disfigure the self-picture and violate deeply ingrained sectors of the personality. However, the attempt to redefine important relationships to self and others places the active blind outside comfortable social channels. Unsupported by cultural forms, these blind individuals find the task of self-expression made difficult, since their response falls within that realm of behavior which lacks social recognition.<sup>19</sup>

Essentially, the more active blind are caught up in the paradoxical position of the marginal individual. Their most congenial responses are stunted and warped when filtered through the traditional forms assigned by the culture, yet rejection of these forms implies that their behavior will not be supported by the institutions of their society.<sup>20</sup> Cutsforth, in the following quotation, explores the socio-psychological trap into which the blind have fallen. "The seeing members of society and the self-regarding attitudes they induce in the blind are entirely responsible for the emotional disturbances found in the blind as a group. The manner in which seeing friends, relatives, and strangers approach the blind induces one of two forms of emotional maladjustment. The blind must either preserve their positive self-regarding attitudes by resisting emotionally the subtle, and not always so very subtle, suggestions of social and organic inferiority, or accept the social and personal evaluation of the seeing, thereby sacrificing their self-esteem. The former retain their self-respect by becoming socially distasteful. The latter gain social approval by selling their self-regarding attitudes for conformity with the attitudes and concepts of the seeing. They become precisely the defectives that society conceives them to be."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, Cambridge, Riverside Press, 1934.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Thomas D. Cutsforth, *The Blind in School and Society*, New York, American Foundation for the Blind, 1951, pp. 124-125.



In striving to adopt a certain novel social role, the more actively oriented blind can achieve limited gains only in a context of constant opposition to their social environment. Such discord between individual and social facets of the self has marked implications for the stability and integrity of a blinded individual's personality structure. The effort involved in continually defining and redefining his situation may exact a heavy toll of anxiety and conflict. He will lack that quiet personal security that owes much to adequate performance in a well integrated and clearly defined role. "In general, it can be said that the stabilizing process owes much to those enduring roles which are characteristic of adult life. As a person shapes his behavior into his occupational role, his marital role, and his parental role, for example, his experience begins to accumulate more and more selectively. The stored up sources of his stability come increasingly out of behavior, within roles. Under stable conditions much strength can thus be borrowed from the environment through consistent playing of consistently defined roles."<sup>22</sup>

The more actively oriented blind not only lack access to such support, but the process of role taking is tremendously complicated by the duality of definition that is often imposed upon a given situation. While he may venture forth with the express purpose of breaking down various attitudes and expectation, it is still necessary for the blinded individual's actions to bear some functional relation to the ways in which others expect him to react.<sup>23</sup> This means that he must not only construct a role which is basically acceptable to the self but, in addition, he must be fully aware of the attitudes and expectations held in the larger society. If he can anticipate the boundaries of his role as others define

<sup>22</sup>Robert W. White, *Lives in Progress*, New York, The Dryden Press, 1952, p. 336.

<sup>23</sup>Norman Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

them, he can then meet, accept, or reject these definitions more adequately.

One could hardly choose a more pivotal area for illustration than the act of helping a blinded individual since, as a social relationship, it evokes a variety of feelings, attitudes and expectations in both helper and recipient. Help is essentially an asymmetrical relationship which may be seriously distorted along the superiority-inferiority dimensions. It has been defined by Hanfmann, Ladieu, and Dembo as "the physical intervention of another for the purpose of enabling the injured man to reach a desired goal."<sup>24</sup> Like other disabilities blindness forces the individual to accept assistance in areas which had previously been considered routine. The more competent blind are highly sensitive to these irretrievable losses, and in their desire to be treated normally, they must somehow meet the contradiction that they need help and others do not. Even this necessary assistance tends to emphasize the disability to both the self and others, and may prove to be the opening wedge for a whole complex of emotionally toned attitudes and beliefs. Chief among these are feelings of pity which tend to flood the social transaction and place the recipient of help in a wholly inferior status. While the more active blind may accept their blindness as a circumscribed disability, they cannot accept the implication of personal inferiority that is inherent in pity. Moreover, unsolicited assistance is often given in regions which fall within the blinded individual's range of competence, and intrusions of this sort hamper his expression of the level of performance he has already

<sup>24</sup> Gloria Ladieu, Eugenia Hanfmann, and Tamara Dembo, "Studies in Adjustment to Visible Injuries: Evaluation of Help by the Injured," reprinted from *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. XLII, No. 2, 1947, p. 173. The authors explored the concept of help as it was perceived by military personnel who had undergone amputation. Their analysis, however, can be readily generalized to other categories of the disabled, and much of the present discussion stems directly from their work.



achieved. Other differences of perspective appear in gauging the degree of inconvenience which the blinded individual will tolerate before seeking aid. Even in troublesome areas unsolicited help is often rejected since it takes from the blind the challenging tasks that offer the greatest sense of satisfaction or self-enhancement. "An awareness of the fact that the attitudes of the helper may determine the acceptance or rejection of help by the injured was shown by one subject. In response to the question as to whether or not a stranger should help a disabled person who seems to need help, he said—'Yes, if you have enough insight, and if you are not going to be hurt at being rebuffed. If you are, don't offer. If you've tried five times and failed, got rebuffed five times, then there's something wrong with you—don't offer.'"<sup>25</sup> The active blind will evaluate help positively only when it leads directly to an enlargement of their space of free movement and is carried off quietly, effectively, or in a manner best described as matter-of-fact. Unfortunately, encounters of this sort are rare in the life of the blind. People not only find it difficult to relate casually to the blind, but in addition they often are unaware of the technique of help that would be appropriate in a given situation. More frequently, these ill-informed and sometimes desperately awkward individuals force themselves upon the blind person, interfering with and crudely distorting his definition of self and situation.

The more passively oriented blind tend to fall in with many of these solicitous acts and emotions, since to some extent such patterns reflect their image of self. As blinded individuals, they can legitimately express various dependency needs and employ their disability as weapon or shield in the process of interaction. From one point of view, they have moved into the blind role with too much alacrity for a wholesome psychological adjustment. From another per-

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.



spective, however, these individuals will display the fullest adjustment possible, since various need dispositions tend to mesh with the role as it is traditionally offered. Yet other components of personality will clash with the role, and the blinded individual who takes this less active path will never fully reach the social and psychological ground that is broadly characteristic of the noninjured. For the role itself lacks clarity, and instability characterizes the attitudes, beliefs and the expectations which surround the blind. Reactions to them will be marked by ambivalence, guilt and other irrational elements which will inevitably disturb the surface flow of action. This uncertainty implies that the more actively oriented blind as well as the more passively oriented blind experience much difficulty in constructing a stable framework of attitudes toward the self. "He meets the same difficulties others have in forming a stable, consistent attitude toward him. He receives the same ambiguous stimuli as others do when he views his own physique. He, too, must separate his perception of his imperfect body from the stimuli that reveal his less imperfect person. He is also faced with a conflict between the cultural values concerning physique and those relating to the dignity of the individual. He fluctuates between feeling ashamed when the physical values are high and feeling an inner strength when the human dignity values are most potent. Moreover, in the case of acquired disability, his new body image conflicts with that of his former self."<sup>26</sup>

Blindness must somehow be worked into an already existent personality organization, and its meaning will necessarily be colored by childhood fears, conditioned needs and unique patterns of defense against the onslaught of anxiety.

<sup>26</sup> Roger G. Barker and Beatrice A. Wright, "The Social Psychology of Adjustment to Physical Disability," in James F. Garret, *Psychological Aspects of Physical Disability*, Federal Security Agency, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Service Series No. 210, Washington, D. C., U. S. Gov't. Printing Office, 1952, p. 26.

The established personality of the newly blinded individual will be forced to express itself, in turn, within a largely new matrix of attitudes and expectations. The shift in pattern will have marked implications for the flux of emotional currents as well as for his habitual modes of relating to others. Various conflicts may be heightened or minimized and defenses against anxiety will be drastically reworked. Defects in the personality may be transformed into assets and assets into defects as the blinded individual relates to others through social channels wholly different from those employed prior to the injury.

In considering the psychological phase of role performance we have maintained that self-expectations are equally as important as the expectations of others. However, the material has been cast primarily in a relational context and has emphasized the impact of the various components of the role upon its occupant. "The social environment shapes the path along which the individual may successfully adapt to his surroundings. It determines the form and range of opportunities which are available for the individual; opportunities for security, gratification of basic needs, self-expression, as well as fulfillment of the larger aims for the self. It also defines the kinds of dangers which the individual must face and fight against. It sanctions some channels for the release of emotion, and imposes prohibitions against others; thus, it controls the flow and inhibition of emotion." The author concludes that "society, therefore, exerts not merely a surface effect, but potentially, affects the depths of personality as well."<sup>27</sup>

Thus the full impact of blindness can only be assayed in a context of human relationships since the personality of the individual and the interactive web form an indissoluble

<sup>27</sup> Nathan W. Ackerman, "Social Role and Total Personality," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, January, 1951, p. 7. The work of Ackerman was instrumental in the organization of the preceding section.



framework of human expression. Efforts to achieve and adjust must also take place within established social patterns or be heavily influenced by them. As individuals accommodate themselves to these social forms, however, they may do so in a spirit of acceptance or rejection. Their adjustive efforts, moreover, will carry a uniquely personal meaning and be expressed in a variety of ways. For some the meaning of adjustment is acceptant passivity, while for others it implies resignation and a kind of uneasy peace. For still others, adjustment means knowledge of where the battle lies, awareness of what it is all about and a determination to wage an unending struggle. The latter successfully meet or overcome the desire for dependence and attempt to bring a framework of meaning to their disability. Significance and purpose is thereby gained and these individuals work out their lives in a difficult but challenging context.

Shifting to a more concrete level much of the foregoing may be illustrated with an experience commonly met by the blind. The setting concerns travel in public conveyances, since the kind of contact found here is most clearly tied in with the societal norms regulating the behavior of those who engage the blind. Upon entering a subway, a blinded individual successfully navigates steps and turnstile, and moves through the various passages leading to the platform. The action is routine. Knowledge of the setting has been gained through orientation and the use of a cane permits efficient mobility. There is an awareness of others, and a distant roar prompts the question, "Pardon me, is this an E train?" "Oh, yes!", comes the startled reply, "I've got you—" and the man to your left takes a firm grasp on your arm. Attempting to free yourself, you object, "That's all right, I can make it . . ." "It's no trouble at all", he protests, and then taking his arm you say quietly, "It's much easier for me this way."

Entering the train, the newly found guide announces,



"There don't seem to be any seats." His dilemma is soon cut short, however, as one of the passengers looks up and says to the guide, "There's a seat for him here." A slight scuffle ensues as the guide attempts to place the blinded individual bodily in the seat. The passengers on either side contribute by moving slightly away from the blinded person who settles in with an abrupt, "Thanks." Once he is seated, the tenseness ebbs from the scene as the passengers, the guide, and the one who gave up his seat exchange knowing glances. Shortly thereafter the guide, in a voice louder than is required by the roar of the train, asks, "Where are you going?" Pausing slightly, the blinded individual replies "I'm getting off at 42nd." "Oh," says the guide, "Well, I get off here. Good luck. Maybe someone else will help you."

In this illustration, we first encountered the blinded individual successfully navigating a rather complex environment. For him physical mobility is a hard won area of competence and has important implications for the conception of self. He is then met by an area of limitation, the inability to distinguish between an express and a local, which cannot be overcome through training or the use of other cues, and is momentarily forced into a dependent relationship with those about him. It is crucial that while his request for information was directed at a single area of limitation, all areas of competence throughout the remainder of the illustration were effectively overridden and the dependent relationship was maintained. Although the blinded individual initially attempted to reject this definition, various situational pressures, including the definition of the guide, forced him into accepting the dependent role.

It will be recalled that the general flow of action was symbolically defined as the guide took hold of the blinded individual's arm. Reversing the procedure by taking the guide's arm instead, the blinded individual has qualified the relationship to some degree, and has at least given some

direction to the help that is being offered. In remarking, "It's much easier for me this way," the blinded individual displays cognizance of the guide's definition of the role, for he offers an explanation of his actions in a manner which can be neatly placed into the more general orientation held by the guide. The baseline of complementary action and reaction has been set up, and the two roles have engaged.

Turning to the passenger who has generously given up his seat, it may be seen that he roughly shares the guide's definition of the blinded individual's status and role. It is significant that he does not offer his seat directly to the blinded individual, but rather turns to the guide with, "There's a seat for him here." Pressures for acceptance of the dependent role have now increased in force as a collective definition of the blinded individual's status is imposed. The blinded individual fills the vacuum of the empty seat and expresses some level of appreciation. Further, onlookers reward both passenger and guide through looks and nods of approval. The action and reaction are neatly geared together, reinforcing the behavioral norms which are thought applicable in the situation. Certain expectations have nicely meshed with performance and rewards have solidified the relationship.

In the final part of the illustration the blinded individual is asked in an unusually loud voice, "Where are you going?" The strength of the voice might be interpreted in terms of the loss of eye contact, or the guide may perceive the blinded individual as a damaged gestalt, tending to generalize the disability into other areas of functioning, and thus, feels he must communicate with an abnormal intensity. The question itself might be viewed as an invasion of privacy. "Good luck" is of course interesting, since it has been selected out of the many possible ways of concluding a conversation. Finally, the phrase, "Maybe someone else will



help you," passes society's obligation on to the others who make up the collectivity and share in its norms.

The illustration has emphasized the seduction of the blinded individual into a role largely defined by members of society. It has pointed up his awareness of this definition, as well as the collective pressures toward conformity. It has further emphasized the overt performance of the blinded individual as his behavior roughly keys in with the expectations of others. The illustration and analysis, however, have left open the question of the blinded individual's full acceptance of the role. The question of acceptance is peculiarly important for the war blind since their status has been recently imposed and must be worked into an already established, habitual mode of dealing with the social environment. The depth and breadth of acceptance or rejection of a role is customarily related to performance. However, the relationship may vary sharply and heighten the possibility of deviance.<sup>28</sup>

While every role allows for some variation, there are boundaries beyond which the incumbent cannot go without subjecting himself to the negative sanctions of persons playing out counter roles. Various features in the blinded individual's situation are such that deviation in the role of blindness is probably not an uncommon occurrence. To illustrate this, we can return to the scrap of interaction that took place on the subway as the blinded individual was offered a seat in the crowded car. He might have reached up, taken hold of a strap, and refused the offer with a vicious, "It's not my feet that are bad, it's my eyes." One can readily see how such a statement, signalling a complete breach of his role by the blind person, would drastically disturb the interactive flow and probably bring it to an abrupt halt. The available range of sanctions which can be imposed upon the

<sup>28</sup> Everett C. Hughes, "Institutional Office and the Person," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLIII, November, 1937, pp. 404-413.

blind is quite narrow, and perhaps the chief mechanism of social control is avoidance. The statement is singularly vicious, since in a situation fraught with various kinds of strain, including some indeterminacy, it rejects the normative definition employed by the passenger who has generously offered his seat. The passenger, expecting rewards for his action, is met instead by a negative sanction. This sanction may further imply that in making the offer he has violated other norms, such as the sanctity, dignity, and autonomy of the individual. If, for instance, the blinded person had simply said, "I don't want the damn thing," and refused the seat on these grounds, the passenger might readily have placed this behavior among some of his preconceptions of the blind. "They are, after all, different, some of them odd and others almost unapproachable."

As suggested earlier, the blind role involves norms which vary sharply from those felt appropriate to the noninjured. The possibility of deviance is heightened in this variant role, since the blinded person is caught in a complicated social and psychological trap. He may attempt to fulfill completely the specifications of the blind role, frustrating his personality needs, or maintain his portrait of self, thereby jeopardizing the relative stability of the interactive process. Further difficulty stems from the unclear or ambiguous role definition which will affect either path that is chosen. This conflict or uncertainty tends to generate an unusual level of strain and in reacting to it, the blinded individual may deviate widely from the role, or from whatever residue that retains solidity of social definition. Deviations may take various directions, and their analysis requires a precise specification of the particular complex of norms which are operative in a given situation. It will be apparent from a normatively variant position as in the traditional blind role, at least one common type of deviation will be a tendency for the blind person to embrace standard roles which are dominant in our society. The more actively oriented blind



would be considered deviant in this context, since they have rejected the traditional formulation and struck out toward roles usually reserved for the noninjured. An analogous case might be that of the precocious child who rejects the norms considered appropriate to his status and instead orients his behavior in terms of adult standards. This general view is central to the following discussion, which attempts to single out the major directions of deviance that are open to blinded individuals as occupants of a variant social role.<sup>29</sup>

The most extreme form of active deviance for the blind person, who is ordered to the variant axis, is aggression. While this area has been extensively treated elsewhere, it should be observed that the targets of much aggression are well-meaning individuals who are acting toward the blind in a manner that seems to them intrinsically right. For the more sensitive blind, this presents a difficult moral problem since expression of aggression evokes guilt, but failure to express it involves an often unbearable degree of suppression. Certain blind individuals forego aggression as a solution to the countless dilemmas posed by the differing definitions of their situation, for it would obviously tend to block their entrance into the larger society. This implies that they must disassociate many feelings and impulses toward sighted individuals.<sup>30</sup> The less sensitive blind, however, often forget that sighted individuals too are under

<sup>29</sup> The work of Talcott Parsons, "Deviant Behavior and the Mechanisms of Social Control," *The Social System*, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1951, pp. 249-325, is basic to the present analysis. It was necessary, however, to modify Parsons' model or paradigm of deviance in a manner which would allow for the incorporation of directions of deviance from the variant role. The critical problem in interpretation concerns the shifting of system-referents and the necessity of keeping the various perspectives straight, or specifying which set of norms, which ideal role is taken as major axis. The axis from which deviation is to be measured in the present case is the traditionally dependent blind role, the role most clearly sanctioned by society as an institutionalized variant model. The approach is extremely demanding and it might be well to turn to the conclusion of this chapter where the material is graphically outlined.

<sup>30</sup> Edwin M. Lemert, *Social Pathology*, New York, McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1951.

strain, and that their gauche actions stem from an understandable base of emotion. Their personality flaws are sometimes quite apparent in the situation and the blinded individual can easily finger out these rough spots. If he lacks restraint, he can quickly stir up waters already troubled. Comments which may be disquieting under any circumstance are given added weight, since they are mouthed by a blind man who is often thought to be more perceptive than others.

The next major direction of deviance concerns the more actively oriented blind as they attempt to participate fully in social intercourse, striving for a symmetrical relationship to the noninjured majority. From the perspective taken here, these individuals must be considered deviant from the social role of the blind as it is commonly offered. They do not merely accept the socially assigned status and become passive recipients of effects. Rather, they act with some measure of initiative, striving toward roles customarily reserved for the noninjured. They desire in their relationships a certain ease or offhand manner, and want only to be received with a traditional unconcern.<sup>31</sup> The conflict in normative orientation is most dramatically emphasized by these blind individuals who seek this new, and what is for them, a more rewarding way of life.

The more passively oriented blind adhere to the traditional role and tend to follow the conforming path of essential withdrawal, stationing themselves at the periphery of group action. Their chosen pattern of withdrawal, however, may be so exaggerated that deviance appears again as they retreat into extreme passivity. Here the blinded individual may isolate himself almost completely from the larger society, becoming a recluse, or he may restrict his social world to those who are blind and live out much of his life within this narrow subculture.

<sup>31</sup> Hector Chevigny, *My Eyes Have a Cold Nose*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1946.



Dominance is yet another form of deviation that is often associated with the more active blind. Their strangeness, the willingness of others to acquiesce, and the added force of the personality as it is expressed from the platform of blindness all combine to move blinded individuals in this deviant direction. Moreover, those surrounding the blind lack access to the usual mechanisms of social control, and the blind may take advantage of this power vacuum as they overcompensate in reacting against the status to which they are ordinarily assigned.

As has been indicated earlier, the more actively oriented blind are striving toward a role closely paralleling that of the sighted. Yet even the desire to be primarily concerned with the values central to the larger society, to maintain proper levels of assertiveness and autonomy which support them in a fundamentally reciprocal pattern of interaction implies a moderate deviance from the traditional blind role. The traditional role is characterized by a submissiveness and dependence which must be overcome if the role is to be institutionalized at a new, and in some sense, higher level of integration.

Obviously the passive blind can also deviate from the variant norm of semi-dignified submission. Just as the active blind individual can move toward a pattern of dominance or less extreme reciprocity, the passive blind can slide into a habit of abasement or self-abnegation as they shirk from the rigors of a sighted world.

In their orientation toward norms, there is a danger that the active blind will try to overfulfill the standards of the sighted dominant majority, assuming a compulsive responsibility. An absurd and extreme example would be a blind individual who insisted on habitual visits to art galleries. He demands to be judged in terms of the same criteria that apply to the noninjured, requiring that sanctions and rewards be meted out in terms of these standards. His devi-

ance may involve elements of denial and refers to a higher level of aggression in applying to himself the full range of dominant values. Essentially there is a perfectionistic overfulfillment of the nonblind role, or active acceptance of a kind of supernormality.

Much difficulty is met by the more active blind as they attempt to comply with the norms held in the larger society. Such compliance represents a deviation from the traditional role which carries with it a legitimately restricted selection and modification of societal norms. Although some movement toward this adherence to majority norms is permitted and may even be encouraged, it is perhaps best characterized as a type of indulged deviance. Even here there are lines which cannot be crossed and strains which color the most casual relationships. The more actively oriented blind are hedged in with, "I want you to move ahead, but I want to protect you, too." These necessarily ill-defined boundaries admit the possibility of unperceived deviance. There is no clear line between compulsive responsibility or overfulfillment, and judicious compliance with norms of the general society. The traditional variant role is itself questionable in definition, since there are no precise standards for determining the degree to which the general norms should be appropriately restricted or applied. Since the standards by which sighted individuals may evaluate the performance of the blind are so unclear, there is a tendency, especially marked in the more passive blind, to slip into a thorough-going avoidance of general norms which may be rightly termed incorrigibility or evasion.

It should be made explicit that the various directions and dimensions of deviance presented above have been linked in with the specific path a blinded individual has chosen to take in relation to his disability. The various deviant orientations, however, may be exhibited by any blinded individual without respect to the kind or level of integration which is



customarily sought. Much like others, the blind will stray from the mark or willfully deviate from the norms which are appropriate in a given social context. But it is crucial to recognize that blindness tends inevitably to force the individual toward marginal acts and orientations. The strain generated by the disability is pressed in from all sides, and in reacting to it, the blind often display deviant or inappropriate behavior. They must somehow handle the dependencies which are inseparable from the handicap and meet a whole range of ill-defined situations. Conflicts over normality will increase tremendously and reactions may swing wildly between childlike and mature orientations. The concern over inner feelings may be extended to attempt to control the outer situation. Thus, passive or regressive behavior may be seen as representing the individual's best efforts to cope with the difficulties presented by blindness.

The sheer inability to see will also have its impact along the dimension of normative conformity. The disability necessarily cuts the individual off from his social world and makes it difficult for him to shape his behavior along appropriate or acceptable paths. Even while in conversation, the blinded individual can no longer perceive the listener's immediate reactions nor can he fully assay the shifts in contextual settings. In restaurants, for instance, he may color his speech with some offhand vulgarity just as the waitress has arrived with the check. There are, of course, a whole range of cues which gradually become available to the blind, and an important empirical problem might be to determine how interchangeable these are or to specify the cues gained by the blind as well as those that are lost. Obviously the blind will lack ready access to a wide range of social information or signals from which they can model their own behavior. This places a heavy burden on those individuals who companion the blind for they must be sensitive enough to

fill in these voids in social awareness. The task is challenging for they are themselves cut off from segments of their own vocabulary and must be capable of verbalizing much that is customarily left unspoken. Failure to do so may set in motion a whole chain of events which will inevitably move the blinded individual still further along deviant paths.

#### DIMENSIONS OF DEVIANCE

<i>Extreme Active</i>	<i>Universalistic Norms</i>	<i>Institutionalized Variant</i>	<i>Extreme Passive</i>
A. aggressive- ness	participation	withdrawal	seclusion or retreat
B. dominance	reciprocity assertion autonomy	submission dependence	self-abnegation abasement
C. compulsive responsi- bility	compliance with wider norms	legitimized restriction of norms	compulsive avoidance of norms
	These may in turn be of two kinds		
a. compulsive enforcement			a. incorrigibility
b. perfectionism			b. evasion



## CHAPTER VI

# The War Blind View Themselves

### Introductory

The interview has been accorded wide acceptance as one of the primary tools of exploratory social research. In its scope and diversity, it tends to elicit a rich mass of source material that is marked by the subtle uniqueness of the individual respondent. This flexibility and richness of expression, however, offers certain critical problems of evaluation and presentation.

Various alternative modes of handling these problems might include the analysis of a single protocol in the search for significant internal relationships, or might involve treating the content of several protocols as a statistical base for broader generalizations. The present chapter, however, is intended to bring the uninitiated reader into a more intimate relationship with at least a few blinded individuals through a selected series of quotations. The modest nature of this goal stems from the restricted number of interviews obtained and the specific kind of technique employed, as well as from the more general character of the instrument itself.

Certain problems arise even in this limited attempt to bring the reader into more direct contact with a segment of the blind, since the series of quotations will lack a context or frame necessary for a full interpretation. For while the material is grouped beneath various headings, each grouping contains the statements of several individuals. Their full interpretation is made difficult since they have been cut away from the unity of a single protocol. Their selection will be arbitrary and the reader should be further prepared for much diversity as he encounters manifestations of com-

pulsive status striving, ambivalence and denial. Other and perhaps more novel inclusions might be the tolerance frequently displayed by the blind minority for the actions of the sighted majority, or the blinded individual's keen awareness of vicious circle phenomena. The problems surrounding the richness and diversity of the material, however, should be markedly reduced, since many of the quotations presented were directly instrumental in molding the preceding descriptive and theoretical sections.

A highly restricted segment of those blinded in World War II was chosen for intensive interviewing. Only those whose disability stemmed from direct military action were selected. The respondents were white, male and of comparable age at the time of disability, which fell roughly in the middle war years. All were either totally blind or possessed some minimal degree of light perception. All those having additional disabilities such as amputation or brain damage were excluded. The rigid criteria restricted the number of interviews to eleven, and these were scattered along much of the eastern seaboard. In addition, two pilot interviews were conducted with blinded individuals who did not fully meet these requirements. While the sample is in no sense representative, there was a conscious attempt to include a broad range of individuals who fell within the criteria cited above. Along the occupational dimensions, for instance, the sample encompassed the unemployed, the re-employed and the newly employed, as well as those engaged within and without work for the blind.

The interview itself might best be described as focused or semi-structured, and its duration was customarily something short of an hour. The interview guide was directed toward four major areas: the impact of society's attitudes, status implications and the problem of acceptance-rejection, oversupport and overpermissiveness and finally, their situation defined. Within this broader framework, the core



problem lay in probing those sensitive areas which stemmed directly from the introduction of blindness. The underlying concern was with the individual's attempt to act out roles usually reserved for the noninjured and anchored in the system of dominant American values. The interview explored both the individual's perception of the surrounding system of expectations and his conception of his own system of rights and obligations. Differing definitions of the situation were examined, as well as support and permissiveness, with their implications for status. Throughout, the attempt was to play upon the dimension acceptance-rejection in the search for uniformities in the blinded individual's conception of his own role, as well as in his perception of the surrounding attitudinal structure. The following material will serve to illustrate these major themes as well as their variations.

## I—Reactions to the Blind

### Rehabilitation and the Hospital Scene

That's one thing—that I've had quite a fear of—and I've observed it so many times in people that I was in the hospital with. Originally a guy would start out and would start going through the training program—the orientation and so forth—he comes to the conclusion that it just wasn't worth it. Oh, maybe he was married or had a family anyway and what the hell—I'll just go home and to hell with all this nonsense—going around crossing streets, learning how to read braille, and so forth—running machine tools. So they go home and there they sit for the rest of their lives. That to me is the most appalling thought in the world—and it's something that I'm going to do everything in my power to avoid.

I don't think the process has been too hard, because there was no question about my sight. I lost both my eyes—and didn't have that hope eternal—and the situation was final and I could accept it.

I think—meeting this doctor in the station hospital the third day I was blind—I think meeting him didn't give me no chance to settle down and think of what I can't do—he gave me the opportunity and the wonderful chance of thinking of the things I could do. Like kicking me out of bed and making me take my enema, and making me shave myself, which I don't—and things like that—and another thing, he walked into the room and there was this nurse feeding me, you know, we had chicken, and he says, "What are you feeding that bum for? He can eat it himself. Let him pick it up with his hands if he can't use his fork." So I mean that was another thing, he didn't give me a chance to think that I can't do things, he made me think that I could and should do things.

So I went down to the Red Cross to one of their classes—weaving—you know, cane baskets—well, I went along for a lark, and I was making the bottom of one of these baskets and I was thinking, God, I'm not going to spend the rest of my life doing this. So this little Englishman was teaching me how—and finally I says to him, "Well, Goddam I can't find the thing, can't you tell me where it is," and he says, "I can't see," and I says, "Well, that's a good pair, neither can I. Jesus. I didn't know that you couldn't see!" So he says, "My buddy, over there, the one playing the piano, he's blind too." Then he showed me his braille watch and I says, "Well how do you get around?", and he says, "Oh, I walk up and down the street," and I says, "Well, what do you do for a living?" He says, "Well, I make these baskets and sell 'em," he says, "You can make a damn good livin'." I say, "You might make a good one in England, but you'd never make one in the United States." He says, "And why not?" and I says, "Well, people just don't use market bags—we use paper bags"—he couldn't believe it. I says, "What about the cars?" and he says, "Well, you stand on the street corner and you listen and then you walk across." And I says, "Oh, my God, things are so simple in England."

### Shift in Societal Attitudes

As a man in uniform you carried your insignia of combat in your wound, and, first of all you knew immediately



that people were looking at you, as a man who had given something, and—not that I felt they owed me anything for it, but the thing is that—well, maybe it goes back to that old feeling about blindness again, this was an honorable blindness, this was one that you won. And you were proudly wearing your uniform as a man who had done his part—in fact you hesitated to take the damn thing off. Because you know what you're going to face—you're just another blind Joe.

Of course, things have changed since I first came home, as they have with you. You were the toast of the town when you first came home and now you're—now you're on your own. You still have—you may have a lot of what you might call fair weather friends, but you probably, like I, have very few real close friends you can count on in a pinch.

### The Portrait of Family

Well, the most difficult thing at that time, of course, was my family, and—social surroundings. Because people were oversolicitous, they all wanted to do something for me, didn't know quite what to do, and they more or less magnified my blindness to the point that I was more aware of it than they were, or I should say, they more or less made it the primary consideration, at that time. "You're blind," "what are you going to do," "you're blind," "what can we do for you," "what's going to happen the rest of your life—this you can't do," "you can only do that," "you're going to miss this" or "you're going to miss that"—they were—you know—in other words—it wasn't the matter of—no—in other words, it gave dimension to all your thoughts—the consideration of blindness.

And then when your children—or my children ask me—one of the first things they asked me—or they'd show me a drawing they had made, or ask me to read to them. While they're young, they didn't adjust to me. They have to adjust, very definitely—and of course it's up to the parents to see that they do—they spill things out to me now. But you do feel at a loss, are at a complete loss, because you can't tell them what they want to know. You

have lost some of your authority right there, and that's the biggest loss I think, in accomplishing everything, is the loss of authority because of your blindness. You do lose authority.

Many of my friends, and at times including my family, just forget to a point that under certain situations—well, like it might be just those times that I would need assistance, because we're in a strange ground or something—they'll go walking and figure I'm trailing behind, which—is a credit. In other words, they've completely sort of put it out of their mind, of, that this fellow, he has to all the time have somebody. Which like I say is, it's a credit to a person.

If you have any sort of pride about you, you want your family to treat you as normal as possible—of course, we have to accept the fact that there are many occasions where we have to, where we need to have assistance—that's acceptable. But there are many times, for instance getting around the house, which is a normal surrounding, you can get around there without any help and to be pampered by the family is wrong, and like I say, if you have any pride, you don't want it. Well, it's just a case then of adjusting as well as your friends and letting them know that no matter what they wish to discuss, whether it's any serious matter or sometimes kiddingly, that they can feel very much at ease because you will never be offended by it. I think this is the first step—it's proven very successful with me.

The mother of the blind person, her instincts go to an overprotectiveness, rather than a helpfulness and with the wife, well, it may be sort of the same thing.

I think that—I had just about as much trouble at home as anywhere, because—well, pity and concern for your situation irritates you anyway, especially during the initial stages of your blindness and the—of course, it's lavished upon you by your family—your mother and father particularly, so that it's extremely irritating. After they came to the realization that the predicament wasn't nearly as bad as they first thought it was, well they—it was just the same as it always was.



But that's the kind of thing that—they're afraid to tell you, your own family, of all people, and mostly so, are afraid to tell you things of that intimate nature, that you will have to be told, and you wonder why the hell they don't but—well, maybe it's to try to keep from hurting you, but my God, you're beyond a hell of a lotta hurts.

I think maybe kids are the finest informants—have no inhibitions about telling you or asking you questions or anything.

Difficulty in orienting to your family? Oh certainly. Anybody says that he don't, I think he's just kidding himself. And you have to do it in the most subtle way you know how. Because, I forgot, I know there's four things in psychology that play a factor in life—fear, love, hate,—I never think of the fourth one now—but those three always stick in my mind. Fear, love, and hate. Of course, first you gotta take the fear angle as far as your family is concerned. Why do they fear so much? Because they love you so much—love is a great thing in life—I think with love—if love, if everybody loved you as much as your family, I think it would be a great thing, but then love can be stretched. It goes into fear, the fear that when you leave the house, if you want to walk by yourself—they fear this, and they fear that, and they love you. And then, of course, they become oversympathetic toward you, which is another form of love. They love you so much, they oversympathize with you. They'll sit you down and they'll, oh you know, they'll say "Don't do this," "here's a chair," "there's a chair," you know or they'll want to tie your shoelaces when you first come home, or they'll button up your shirt or your jacket. And you really got a problem, you've got a problem on your hands, I mean you got a problem trying to teach your family. Because to them it's a new life, as well as it is for yourself—and you've got to teach them that you could do things for yourself, and you teach 'em, you're teaching them what you could do, and eventually they get to the fact of to learn what you could do, and they learn your limitations by themselves. And you don't have to teach 'em the limitations, because limitations are always there in their mind.

Because over- so oversolicitous so overwhelming—they love you so much.

### Occupational Adjustment

Well, along with pity, I would think the most important thing, from the standpoint of a guy who was trying to fit himself back into a useful sort of an occupation, to overcome is the misconception that a blinded person can't do a damn good job in industry.

Second of all, as far as the employer is concerned, well, it's strictly up to the blind to pull out the various jobs under this man's employment and say, well, how, we feel we can do this, we not only feel we can do this, give us a chance, several weeks and if we can live up to production, of whatever you feel it is best for us to put out, and if we can live up to that, if not better, that is all we ask is a chance. But we have to prove it to them.

Although I can't understand employers, because during the war they hired a lot of blind, yet when the war was over they fired 'em all.

The world of employment of blinded people has not been sufficiently explored—the confidence of employers is not very high, because they haven't had sufficient examples, and they can't have sufficient examples until they try.

The initial barriers are terrific—you see I had a foot in the door by having worked here.

Some people hate to take you, know what I mean, take a blinded man on a job. They think they might get hurt or somethin' like that.

It's hard to get a job, that's all. That's the only thing. Otherwise you'd enjoy yourself. A lot of blind fellows make it miserable for themselves, you got to enjoy yourself while you're living, you know what I mean.

Give us a chance to get over that initial breaking in period, give us a real fair trial, and if we make a go of it, fine, and if not, approach us as they would approach



anybody else and say you're not fit for the job, goodbye. I think it'd make a better man out of the blind fellow and I think it'd make a better man out of the employer.

Of course I seek employment by an employer that will understand my problems, and will understand the problems he's up against, as well as what I'm up against. I feel that it's a 60-40 proposition—the 60 per cent is on my part, making the employer understand what I'm capable of and what I think I could do. And the 40 per cent is on his part, to try to understand—I feel that I have the biggest job, in other words, but I'm willing to start at a lesser wage and prove myself and if I do, and if he's satisfied, I certainly want to be in line for promotion on the same basis as any sighted individual.

You find the type of employer that will try—we had some—that'll try to use you for their own purposes, exploit the blind, which of course, I don't go for—put it a better way, we don't—let me put it, we don't go for. You run into some people trying to sell gimmicks on a strictly exploitation basis, I mean they figure they could exploit the blind to their best advantage—although they say, "Well, you're going to get something out of it, you're making money, you're making a living." You take the average blinded individual, the average veteran, let me put it that way, the average blinded veteran, on the whole—he's more particular the type of work he approaches than the average civilian blind.

Now the employer situation there—what I ran across in—they don't understand the blind at all, as far as employment goes, regardless of, I mean how much propaganda is put out, I mean ability, ability that counts, not disability, it doesn't seem to penetrate, you get the average employer, who—I think it's the individual employer, who owns his own business, or small factory or something like that, he'll say, he'll hesitate hiring a blind man—Well, I ran across it years ago, this famous saying, "How could I fire you, if you're no good," that's the first thing that comes into their minds—and inasmuch as if you say that to them, to me, "You could fire me as long as you could

fire a sighted individual. I won't—I'll feel as bad as a sighted individual if you fire me, but if I haven't got the ability I certainly want you to do it, if I haven't got the ability for the job, I certainly want you to do it, if I'm not fit for the job." Well, I had one fellow say, he said—"Send me an—send me an amputee, send me a wheelchair case, but don't send me a blind individual." He had the frustrations toward the blind, that's all.

When I first came back here, I think the orders were passed out that I was to be given a lot of leeway. I don't think I've disappointed anyone in my capabilities, but what does bother me is that you have to force down people's throats the fact that they should let you try it. Don't have any skepticism about it, if you fail you'll be willing to admit it, but if you can do—it's that much more that you're worth to yourself. Not particularly to them, because they can get somebody else to do this work, but the thing is that what you're trying to accomplish is the self-satisfaction that you're doing a good day's work. You know when you are—nobody else but you knows when you are.

### The Core Emotional Response

I think the, possibly the most important attitude to change would be the feeling of pity. That is obviously the most irritating. Just how you would go about changing it, I don't know, because it is so difficult for people to put themselves in the shoes of a blinded person without being absolutely appalled.

This attitude of pity made me boil at first. I was just a—just in a perpetual state of fury—all the time. The reflection that it put on me was that I was a—considered pretty much of a cripple, and that my situation was such a hopeless situation, that the only thing that people could do for me was to offer their solicitudes—that's, that's the thing that bothered me excessively.

Because a lot of people I imagine would be embarrassed, or I don't know, it just overcomes them emotionally, and they just can't get along with a person who's blind, be-



cause they feel it's such a horrible thing, you feel—They're just a little bit too attentive, you know, which you can overdo.

You mean the general public? Well, I honestly believe that they think that we're inferior to a sighted person, and it's mostly emotional with them. They wouldn't really, I don't believe, unless they know the blind, judge him as an individual. It's always the pity routine.

I think any minor irritations would simply be a result of some ramification of this pity business, and the difficulty that a person typically has of regarding you without being appalled.

If, well, I think they think about it, it's just pity, they just pity you. You very seldom get a person, unless they've been around the blind that honestly can accept you as an individual. At least that's my opinion. Most of them just feel sorry for you.

Even on the radio now there's a soap opera, on the radio now, a milk man has gone blind and so he's going to leave his wife so he won't be a burden to her, you see. And they take the attitude, and that's how you educate people, now people will think a blind person is a burden to anybody.

You have some emotionally unstable males who will even go so far as to kiss you, it happened to me a couple of times—very embarrassing—but of course you can't see them coming.

For example, one time when I was in Chicago—some people invited me out to dinner, and the guy in the family got a little bit tight—he got a bit too much to drink. God he just about broke into tears over my situation and he kept repeating over and over that my—my life was ruined. Well, dammit, if somebody tells me that often enough, it really bothers me. I think well—good Lord—maybe I'm living in a fool's paradise here, maybe my life is ruined—and dammit, it is ruined, if you let people—if you let people continue with that attitude. It's ruined as far as they're

concerned, and unless you can—you can show them otherwise, why you're just a crippled goldfish in a—in a goldfish bowl.

In travelling this happened to me one day. It's only happened to me this drastically this once, where this elderly woman fell over my cane, which is apt to protrude in front of you in the movement method and she fell to the sidewalk. I'll never get over that, because it's quite vivid in my memory. She had fallen to the sidewalk, refused assistance of me because I was blind—she was bleeding from the mouth. She had smashed her mouth, or cut her lips with her teeth. I wanted to help—she didn't want my help. She felt perhaps, I was blind, I couldn't do anything for her. People gathered, and then it became very magnified in my own mind. In that situation alone, the reactions of the people, the people were more in favor of me, and more concerned about me, and I had no—no scars, nothing had happened to me, but the fact that I was blind, they worried about what had happened to me, said it was a shame such things happened, and are you all right—I guess it reminded them—they felt it was the fault of the woman more so than mine. And of course my reaction, when I got home, I felt very bad about it, and it upset me to the point where I put my cane in the corner and felt that perhaps I wouldn't travel any more. That we have to accept that fact, that at times people will be hurt because of us. So I immediately went out travelling and have been travelling ever since. But that was the closest I have ever come to a feeling that, well, that perhaps I didn't belong in society, that I was going to hurt someone.

Some people just hate to face it, you know what I mean, seeing a blind person. Some people just do.

There was a bar in my neighborhood and when I first lost my sight I went in there with a couple of friends and he would never let me pay for my drink, so I've never been back there since. Because—I don't know, I just don't like that. It's not that I don't appreciate people trying to be kind, but kindness is once or twice, but not all the time. If somebody wants to buy me a drink, all right, but I sort



of want to return the favor. I want to think that I can do the same as he can.

### Lack of Knowledge

I should think his first thought would be how shall I handle this.

Don't know how to handle you, don't know what to do for you, doesn't know which way to help him, doesn't know—he doesn't know the limitations and the ability of a blind man, let me put it that way, 'cause I know we have limitations. I don't cross the street myself, at least not in New York. He doesn't know the limitations.

A sighted person looking at a blind individualist would tend to underpraise, because they're not aware of your abilities. Like a lot of people, I venture to say a majority of people feel that you always need assistance. Why it's amazing to them how when they see a blind person go in and dial a telephone in a pay booth, they just can't understand it.

Along with the pity ordinarily and naturally they have the outlook that these people just can't do nothing for themselves, and that's from probably taking a bath to dressing themselves, no less than trying to go out and obtain a living, of which they're capable.

Everything is just so sensational just because a blind person does it. That whole attitude is all wrong.

Oversympathetic. But when I say oversympathetic, I mean very good-natured. Actually, let me say no harm is meant by them at all. Let me clarify that oversympathy angle. No harm is meant by them at all. It's just the idea that—oh, normal frustration on their part—and they don't know—and oversympathy, if you know what I mean. They get frustrated, they don't know what to do for you, or how to do it, or how to act toward you, of course the frustration I guess stems from oversympathy. They're not so—they don't know how to approach you. They don't know how to handle you, or what to do—and it's up to the blind individual to take the situation in hand.

Well, I would say that upon the first meeting, an introduction, you generally find the individual is very uncertain, is very careful, and is perhaps a bit confused about what to do. That is the first reaction. As they get to know you, and notice how you move about, they become relaxed and after awhile, my experience has been, they're a little amazed. They don't realize you can move about quite casually, and that you're very normal. I think the first reaction is that here is something strange and they don't know what to do about it. And their first action is to get you seated. Because then they feel, well, nothing can happen, and you're out of harm's way. That is the first reaction. As I said, after they watch you for awhile, and I believe that you are under scrutiny at all times—they are watching and studying, and any little anything you may do which is normal, seems accentuated, is emphasized by the fact that you are blind, and they don't expect you to be able to do certain things. And when you do, then their reaction is that you're a genius or something, and yet it's a very normal action on your part. That has been my experience with most strangers, we'll say. You get practically that same reaction from friends. And depending upon the—perhaps the aggressiveness, or the character of the individual, that in a way also has a bearing on their reaction to you. Some people who are very aggressive will react what you might consider more normal, what you and I might consider more normal, whereas the shy and retiring individual, who's afraid to do things, you get that same reaction to your blindness too.

### Acceptance and Rejection

Some people avoid you, you know. They don't want to let you know they're around.

Well, the people I know of course, because now they accept me—and, they used to accept me before I lost my sight. But at first they treated me as if they were walking on eggshells.

Usually, when you first meet—I find it mostly with girls, I don't know why, but they seem to show it more.



They're sort of squeamish about shaking your hand, or they just won't shake it. You have your hand out there and they won't even touch it.

Some people hate to be with the blind, you know what I mean. I don't know, whether they don't like to associate with 'em or what, you know what I mean. Some times people figure, they, some people I think, they figure, they hate to get in touch with a blind fellow, you know what I mean, talk, and—they wouldn't know what to say, you know what I mean—I guess some people take the blind, some people don't.

I think the adjustment has been appreciably made, except maybe in two areas, aside from the loneliness which you can't do anything about.

A terrific desire to make contact with other people which is not forthcoming. It's very hard to do, as you know. I mean, that is, people who you don't meet through introductions, I mean in your normal life prior to blindness you had the opportunity to smile at somebody and you might get a return smile, say hello to a man on a platform, of course men are a little different, but—go into a bar and you might strike up a conversation—well, you're very much alone. Because, as I say, people have a tendency not to make up to you and, secondly, you have no way of making up to them. And you've lost your eye-appeal, I guess, and I don't like that at all, and I've never been able to solve it.

With regard to other disabilities such as the loss of an arm or a leg, without any particular malformation, it doesn't seem that the public has any compunction about accepting those people as normal. Yet with the same loss of member, or the same type of disability—maybe more severe, but in the same category, you're not accepted as normal—in fact even half the time you're not even accepted.

I don't think anyone would avoid you—on the other hand—I think there are some people who've been seeking me out just because of my blindness.

With people that you work with, I would say that, well the very fact that they've heard about you, the very fact that at one time or another they have seen you, therefore when they meet you they are a little more at ease, because they know something about you, they've heard—there is a slight bit of carefulness about their action, yet after the first few moments I believe in most instances, you find that they react very normally after awhile.

Well, I think that the most troublesome thing which is something I touched on a little while ago, is a fear on the part of the person whom I'm talking to or who's trying to help me or something like that. It's—I think that the basis for it is that the thought of blindness is such an abhorrent idea to a person 'til it's actually happened to them that he simply cannot talk to a person without having a great deal of uneasiness and apprehension for fear he'll say something or do something which will offend in some way.

A few people are very much interested. Most people are afraid. But then the only way you can really tell whether they have accepted you or rejected you is by if you ever try to get in touch with them again, then you'll know—or if—say, they say they'll see you some time, and they never show up.

The only reason I feel isolated is because I can't see somebody that I know—and go up and start talking to them, and I have to depend on someone to come over and start talking to me. It is—it's a rather lost feeling to stand there and twiddle your thumbs 'til somebody does come along.

There are some people that do avoid the blind. Because they just don't know and they are—are afraid, because they've been taught all their life, why whatever they read or hear, that the worst thing that can happen to a person is to lose his sight.

### The Blind as Minority Group

The blinded should mingle in with the sighted, you know what I mean. That way it's much better, you know. That helps a lot, too.



One thing that I've maintained down—from the year after I lost my sight—and had a lot of disagreements—if you're blind, stay the hell away from blind people, because they're your biggest downfall. They latch onto you, you latch onto them, it's a common bond of disability, they'll carry you down and pull you down. Your competition is with sighted people, get with them and stay with them. That's the big problem we have, the big problem the public has to face.

You don't pose it as a blind person. People don't think about it any more. They've gotten used to it and there's no reason to think about it any more—but when it comes to doing some task or something, you know your own limits, and you may have a little skepticism about it, but you want to get into it, you want to be more a part of the gag, you want to be more a normal part of life, and you strive, sometimes overly so, to get more and more into the picture, not for selfcentered attraction, but for participation.

The way these institutions want to treat the blind, they always want to segregate them. Whenever they have a dance, they have a dance for blind people, they don't particularly go out to invite sighted people, or encourage them to go out. With the bowling alleys they have special bowling alleys, just for the blind. They don't try to teach us to use bowling alleys that ordinary other people use. And they always kind of segregate the blind. I suppose that that's their job.

But after all, I look at it this way, we're the ones who are the oddities in the situation, and a little temperance on our part will make life much more enjoyable for everybody.

Because it's just like any other normal friendship, when you meet a person, if you like him, regardless of what his color, disability or religion is—if you want to keep him as a friend, you seek him out.

Let's take the blind—in my opinion, they're a minority group. And as you know, the average—the majority when it comes to minorities—at times, it acts very funny.

Travelling I use a dog. Now I chose a dog for two reasons. One of them is the psychological effect the dog has on the impact of blindness to the general public. It takes the attention of the public away from you and focusses on the dog. And all you hear is extreme admiration for the dog, what a beautiful dog it is and what type of work it does, and you're not even part of it. Sometimes, it—you feel jealous, especially as far as the women getting down on their hands and knees and petting your dog, and that's actually what happened. You say, "Why waste all that affection on the dog?" Now, I've never used a cane, publicly. I've carried one, I've had it torn out of my hands in Grand Central Station, and, people here in the city are, of course, very careless about looking where they're going. You have to adopt the attitude that, well, after all you are in the minority, and, if you were sighted you would be part of the same hustle and bustle, that they are.

## II—The Impact of Blindness

### Their Difference

That we are no different than anybody else, that is my basic idea.

I am different than other people and I realize that, and that would be the one thing that I would want to change, the fact that—my difference is not of such an importance that they should feel that I'm incapable of disposing of things.

We are different, we have to realize that we're different, people know we're different, but we're not different to the extent that people unfortunately think that we are different.

You're no different from other people except that you can't see.

I told them, just to talk to me as if I was anybody else. After all, I've got to live in a sighted world, I don't want them to live in a blinded world, so I have to live in their world, I might as well use their language. Because you



really can't expect them to come into your world. Not unless they're able to live with it every day, and they don't. And I honestly think that's right and proper, to use the word "see" and "read" and things like that, because it sort of looks funny, you go around talking, "Oh, I had this read to me" and "this I heard" and—"This"—when you can say "I seen this" or "I read it" or somep'n you know.

Well, first of all to find out his limitations, and then to treat him as a normal human being—see—as though he really is a human being. But we all do have our limitations, because otherwise—even sighted people have their limitations.

I guess they should treat you the same as anyone else.

Among the blind we are no different than among the sighted. As far as our psychological problems go, let me put it that way, we are no different. Among us we have sympathy seekers, among us we have drunkards, among us we have shiftless, among us we have people that are lazy, that don't want to work, of course, that's being shiftless, among us we have people that have, that are ambitious, that want to work, among us we have people that are very well educated, among us we have people that are averagely—that have an average education—among us we have people that have a poor education. Among us we have people that have no education. Among us we have people that have common sense and among us we have people that have no common sense. And I find that we are no different than any other group when it comes to psychological approach, that we are just as well off, and just as poorly off as any other group.

Someone says to me, "You're blind?" Well, I know I am, there's no sense—what's the use kidding myself or trying to kid anybody else. Which I know some blind people have, they don't give in to themselves that they're blind. I mean, look, I think, I take blindness, I know it's, I—I mean, people call it a handicap—although I'm not very successful in life I call blindness an inconvenience. I mean, that's the way I feel about it.

But now it's gotten to the point where the conversation is normal, it's a sighted conversation. They don't particularly use the word "hear" for "see"—you know, they don't substitute the word "see" for "hear."

In other social aspects, well, you like to, having had your sight at one time, having praised women for their beauty, for the way they look, their dress and so on, you have lost that and have to find other means of operation and you're aware of that, you're aware of that when you go out with a girl, you know that the girl has dressed for a date, and you can't say she looks exceptionally fine. You're aware of that, you realize that, it's there, it's in the back of your mind at all times.

After a while, I sort of felt that I could see things as good as anybody else—cause after a while you learn that you see with your brain and heart more than the—more than you do with your eyes.

### Independence and Dependence

I miss the ability to move about, physically, the mobility. I wasn't able to indulge in any of the sports I had done before, I wasn't able to drive my own vehicle and I think those are the things that inconvenienced me more than anything else. Added to the fact that I had to ask for assistance—probably that was the biggest blow of all, was the fact that I had to ask people, that I had lost a great deal of my independence, which I had before.

Well, I would say, oh there are a hundred little things and sometimes major things in the course of a day that always makes you aware of it. Whether it would be, of course now, for instance, we don't notice ash trays here, pull out a cigarette to smoke, next thing would be we'd want the ash tray. If there's nobody around to hand it to you, right there you're going to fumble around on the desk. And of course there's a point that's of annoyance to a lot of blind people, they don't want to fumble around.

Well, of course, travelling is always a—is the most important thing, because it could always—well, it could be



very serious, wind up very serious in injuries to you, so you've got to be really on the ball when it comes to traveling, if you want to do it independently, as much as possible.

Well, in travelling situations, you just become preoccupied in your own thoughts, and you don't—people are—at the stop on the subway, or the stops on the train, or the number of blocks that you have crossed in walking, you find immediately that you are lost. You don't have anything to identify the immediate spot you are in. And therefore you—you have to inquire, because of your blindness, and—and then you're taken aback for a moment, you realize that you're blind.

### Conflict over Help

Some of the worst things—well, in my estimation one of them would be to try to be too helpful. That would be something that perhaps would annoy me, but on the other hand I also realize and understand they are trying to do their best. And so therefore you make allowances—I think that would be most offensive.

Anybody tries to assist you, nine times out of ten, he really doesn't, because it sort of all gets in your way and doesn't really assist you. But whenever I run into things, or having someone that's been hanging on, you know, grab your arm and just sort of push you forward. Well no—they're really a great help.

But I wouldn't change the public for no money in the world, 'cause I think they're wonderful people. Even with their over-oversympathy and all that, they're out to help you. And that's the important part in life, is to help each other. Regardless of whether you're sighted or blind, we all need a little help one time or another.

I never ask for help unless I'm desperate or something like that, you know, which I never was—I guess I would, if I was desperate. I guess most of us, regardless if you're sighted or blind, if we're desperate, we do ask for help.

You never have any trouble until people try to help you, because they grab you and really get behind you and start pushing.

Like when you want to do something, you know, if you had your eyesight, you know, that makes it tough, you know, like, it's pretty hard to do things, yourself. This way, you want to do things yourself, and you still got to have somebody to help you. That's when you always need some help around. When I want to do something, you know, it's pretty hard for me to do it, you know, if you were sighted, it would be different, you could do it.

Well, I think that as far as travelling is concerned, to get down to specifics, I think that people do tend to overhelp and at first I found that very irritating. I think you probably have the same feelings when somebody comes up and grabs you by the arm and starts hauling you around and you don't know where you're going. Well, I found that quite irritating at first until I finally came to the realization that it's awfully damn hard for a sighted person to put himself in your shoes, to understand just exactly how you feel about it because it's a such an alien situation to him. Eventually I got callous to it more or less and it just didn't bother me any more.

Here in the city I find that people are more than gracious, for all the hard heart that New York City is supposed to have, it's probably the softest hearted city in the world. Even with my dog, if I walk up Park Avenue, I've had people—I can't walk past two street crossings without having somebody coming to offer aid, and that surprised me in the beginning. Of course they tell you to be on your own, but you can't. People won't let you and rather than be a nasty bastard and say, "No, leave me alone," or try to explain to them, which will take you ten minutes, you lose your time, you say, "O. K., Let's go," and get it over with.

I think it's completely up to the person that's blind. I mean I have seen a few guys who were—totally blind, who got themselves in a hell of a vicious circle. They developed a resentment against people who came up and tried to be



helpful, and hauled them around by the arms, and as soon as they had developed that sort of resentment, well, people were even more afraid of them and shied away from them—the result being that it became even more difficult for them to make friends. They developed sort of a persecution complex, and retreated more and more from society.

I mean years ago when a blind man was begging, there were lots of blind beggars, they thought every blind man was a beggar and the great majority still thinks that the best thing a blind man can do is beg—and I feel, of course, it's a process of education—and I feel that even if it's oversympathy, if they're trying to help you and you don't disturb them in any fashion, when another blind man comes along, they'll help him too.

They're only helpless to the point where they can't see.

And I've met many people up at school who have been very, very nice not in a way to help you with your studies or anything like that, but just to go have a cup of coffee or something like that. Lot of fellows sort of reached out their hands in a sort of bond of friendship, not oversolicitous and not trying to help you in any way, but just see if there's anything they can do that you might need. But let you ask for it, they don't offer nothin'—they'll be right at your side if you want anything, and that sort of fellow I appreciate more than the oversolicitous type.

If a guy has it in his heart to do good, why should I discourage him.

When you approach a curb at an angle, and people don't realize that they should approach it broadside—of course, you can explain it to 'em all day long and they'll do absolutely the same damn thing over again, because to them a curb is a curb and when they say "up" it's all right, doesn't matter which foot of yours goes up first.

And then as far as food is concerned they're extremely solicitous—in fact, they—if you'd let them, they'd feed you.

There are many little things that get in your way, right here I mean—the people. You'll be walking along, and people will, friends, very close friends, might have a tendency to twist your hips in the right direction, twist your shoulder, pull your arm, even though you have a dog guiding you—after all, these people are very good friends of mine, what can I say, I mean I've explained to them time and time again, but it's a natural tendency to be of aid.

Well, he should consider, first of all, not to—just to be natural, to treat him as an individual, and not to overdo like most of them do, you know. Especially if you should go into a restaurant with a person who's not used to being with a blind person, he sort of makes things awkward for you, by—by stage whispers—and I object to that. And I object always to people without even asking me, cutting up my food for me, you know, because there are some things I can handle very easily, and other foods I can't. I don't mind, I'll do the asking, but sometimes, you haven't got the choice. People just do it.

I have that tendency, if somebody takes my arm, I immediately rebel, but I don't rebel to the point where I get nasty about it, I manage to work my arm around to theirs and they catch on because most times I have stronger arms than they do. And of course even to this day my wife'll—every once in a while she'll give me a little push on the shoulder, but she knows better.

### Location of Responsibility

The blind person definitely has to take the initiative and he has to go out and break the ice—there's just no two ways about that.

There is nothing to stop me from forging ahead—if there is anything in my way, it's my own fault.

I'm not satisfied that I convince people that I can do what I think I can do.

Prior to being blind you are not always honest with yourself, but I find that if you are blind, you've got to be



if you want to come out on top. You've got to face the situation factually, and you've got to approach it the same way. No matter how hard it is to swallow, and how difficult it's going to seem to be, you've got to recognize that there it is before you, and that you're either—are weak, can't do it, or you're going to try it. I find that even if I—I hate anything that doesn't smack of honesty—with myself—I don't care about other people—I found I used to cheat myself in little things, make excuses for myself—I don't do that any more. And I'm a better man for it.

I don't get mad at kids' bicycles and tricycles being on the sidewalk, I feel that they have every right to be there. I curse when I hit 'em, but I don't blame anybody but myself.

Well, it's unavoidable—I mean, even if you were a sighted person and you could make no contribution whatsoever to the social group that you're a part of—obviously you'd fall by the wayside just like a blind person. It's—it's as mechanical as that—I think that's, that's something which is apart from the emotional aspects of the situation.

I think it may be partially because of my particular personality. A person who is a very, an extremely good mixer, probably would have a little less trouble than I do because so many people I know have the ability of putting people at their ease right off the bat. I think that I have developed that capacity to a great extent since my injury but it's true you do—it took me quite awhile around here for example to accumulate a fair number of friends because it is definitely a block unless you do have a tremendous ability to break down these feelings of apprehension on the part of those people you're in contact with.

### The Minority's Tolerance of the Majority

We all travel in tough neighborhoods, and I think I travel in a very tough neighborhood, mostly in the garment center of Manhattan, you know, between 34th and 40th, between 5th and 9th Avenues, and you run into all classes of people, people that can't speak English, people that can't understand English, too well, and universally I

find that just the pleasant voice that you use—or the slight “kibitz”—let me put it that way, that you—or the jokes, you see, that you—you get more of—out of them than trying to be stern or trying to be actually a—teaching them, you know. That’s what I find, anyway, as far as travelling goes.

You run into some individuals who are overbearing, who want to do everything for you and got to explain your way out of it, you know, or let me say, kid your way out of it, let me put it that way, joke your way out of it, turn their viewpoint into yours, and let ’em handle you the correct way. And I think it takes a greater mark of patience, not so much on the part of the public, but on the part of the blind individual, to have patience with the sighted individual, teach him the simple orientation of helping a blind man across the street, or setting him straight, or teaching him.

I’ve found the best way to do it is by a smiling voice, let me put it that way—and—a little funny saying or a joke, and they fall right in line with you and they get educated much quicker that way than being severe or persistent with them, you know.

I would say the biggest stage is the patience that you’ve got to work yourself up to, a definite attitude that you definitely can’t get yourself excited and go off the handle. Whether you’re alone, or whether it’s with other individuals, and so forth, it just doesn’t help if you’re trying to reach any goals. You’re definitely going to hurt yourself at all times.

Once you put people at ease, where they can talk with you, I believe you automatically fall at ease yourself—it’s the tension that—this person doesn’t understand me, and all, but it’s always up to the blind person to put over this point. If he doesn’t try he certainly can’t expect the sighted person to ever understand. Because of the abrupt answer it has scared these people who have approached blind people where they feel they’re scared to do it to any other person—I’ve had many people approach me and say that I didn’t know whether I should approach you or



not, because gee, last week I was bawled out by a blind person I tried to help—and this is very bad. So again it all falls back into the blind person's hands, or any disability. You've got to prove it to them.

And I think that that reaction is mostly due to your own reaction—if you appear confident, if you're sure of yourself, I believe that that individual gets that reaction, and feels that same way himself. It's just like selling, if you have the confidence, if you're able to persuade the individual to your way of thinking, you're doing a kind of selling job—when you're blinded it's the same thing. So, depending what your action is, you will get that same kind of reaction—I believe—that has been my experience.

Their outlook at life, which has to be, to my way of looking at it always cheerful. You can't be trying to impress a person and put a point over of just what you—what a blind person can do, if you're going to be gloomy and have that sad tone affecting you, because you're automatically fitting into their line of thinking, of just pity-ness. But if you try to—just talk in a normal sense, with a proper tone of personality, a little laugh or something every now and then, a little joke or what haven't you got. Somebody's walking along with you, it might be only a minute, crossing a street, just turn around and say, it's a beautiful day isn't it, stuff like that. You're just putting over the points—that, well, you don't have to be as scared of me, just because I'm blind. I mean I'm still an individual that has had a little—somewhat sensible, and can carry normal conversation. I think it's very important.

Once you've put yourself over to them, you've reached a goal on that point. I'd like to point out an example on that, for instance now, a person, you might walk into a wall, you know, which you felt that you were heading for a doorway—well—naturally a sighted person has a tendency to ask for immediate pity and—bad feeling comes in that they feel that you might have hurt yourself, bad, but the thing is that you've got to bounce it off real fast, and the way to do it is with a joke. I'll turn around and I'll say, "Well, I think this doorway needs a little widen-

ing anyway.” You know, stuff like that, you know, just these little gestures where it’ll create a laugh, and then which once you create that little joke it automatically throws out the—the sad outlook which they might have, when you did bump yourself. In conversation—I mean you’ve got to accept your handicap, regardless of what, blindness, mainly, of course. Once he accepts it a hundred percent, he’ll put it over to the other fellow, if he wishes to. I mean, my attitude is, what’s the difference, if some fellow comes up to you, whether it’s a girl or a fellow, you turn around in a real joking way, you know, and say, “You’re looking real good today,” you know what I mean, this puts you on a very nice basis with them. Because you’re trying and in return, they’re going to give you everything they’ve got.

### Reversal of Roles

It’s always good to allow a person who offers assistance, because right there you build them up.

I haven’t got myself in mind so much as I have the next fellow in mind that might come along that might need the help, that’s in my group, and therefore I try to be as gentle and as friendly with the public as I could. I feel it’s my duty to. And also I feel that they’re doing me the favor, I’m not doing it for them. And—I’m soliciting their help, they’re not soliciting mine—but actually the way it turns around, I mean, they’re soliciting to help me, you know.

I think they try to be helpful. I think they try to be kind—I think they try not to be afraid. By afraid I mean that any action on their part might be the wrong thing. So they try to be not afraid, and try to take some action, rather than not take any at all. I think you mostly find people are very attentive to what you have to say. And I’ve also found, whether this is general or not, I do not know, but they seem to enlist your aid, in certain things. Very often they try to get your philosophy. I think they start to wonder, particularly if they’ve watched you for any length of time, and have noticed that your deportment seems very normal, that you’re happy, you don’t seem to



worry, you don't seem to be depressed—well—all those things, when they sum them up probably to them must mean that you have some philosophy behind them.

### Turning the Stereotype Back upon the Self

And I had no desire to use the cane—and I still don't. I hate it with a passion. It goes back to that pity that was elicited by blind people from me when I had my sight. And I still think it's a most horrible thing—I hate the damn thing.

That fact more than anything else helps a blind person in adjusting. Yes—because if he just kept those thoughts to himself, if the people about him didn't voice them, you get different opinions from a different person, what are you going to do, what's going to happen, what about your association with the opposite sex, and so on, how are you going to adjust, and by giving it weight, by projecting it out where everyone can see it, you're more able—you're better equipped to evaluate it than if you just kept it to yourself. Well, no one else would—would even consider you, you'd get to feel that way, that you're a lost soul. Well then you get to feel that people are just as concerned over your welfare as you are.

Well, being blind, I couldn't take—I'm afraid I was antisocial there for awhile, I didn't go out of the house—I didn't think I was fit to do anything really. I sort of gave up on the whole thing.

Well, I can only go by what I felt before I lost my sight, and I try to understand how people will feel toward me, through that. There was a natural tendency to shy away from blind people, well, I would say for a multitude of reasons, the uneducated—I shouldn't say that—but those who have been taught by erring parents, that a great deal of blindness is caused by venereal disease, had tended to make me shy away from them. Then the fact that most blind people I saw in my sighted life were not well dressed, or too neat, and, well, being on the needy side, seedy side you might call it, so I had a tendency to believe that they were also more on the panhandler side.

Then of course there is the eliciting of pity, your own pity, for them. And which, the combination of the three things, the unknown causes of blindness, the apparel of the blind person, and the pity that you have for them, was sufficient to make you stay sufficiently far away so that you didn't come in contact and have to talk with them. And especially in the city like this, where you see the blind are panhandlers mostly. Now of course with the advent of World War II and with its crop of young and enthusiastic blind people, and you being one of them, you change your attitudes a little. But it still remains that people still look upon you, whether you're well dressed or whether they know you're a war veteran through what you might wear—I don't wear anything myself—but I don't think their attitude is one of fright because of the reason for the blindness nor one of shyness because of your dress, because most of us are pretty well taken care of, but still the item of pity. To see young, good, healthy human bodies destroyed brings out that pity.

My idea was that I'd be sitting on the front porch with a corncob pipe in my mouth the rest of my life.

## Denial

You're just going to have to go on living and enjoy yourself and find out what it's all about. You think about it, I think you're concerned about it too, I don't believe you actually worry about it.

I'd say in all my experience with people, at no time have I given them one moment to be depressed. I think at all times the conversation, the attitude, and reaction has been light, has been happy, has always been full. It—it hasn't been as though something is lacking, nor have I ever felt left out of anything.

You see, like I say, I think my attitude from the beginning was fortunate, I accepted the fact and once I accepted the fact I put it completely out of my mind—I don't say that there aren't moments occasionally when you get to a possible slight melancholy setup, but if you're smart, you'll try to get it right out of your mind by—you



know—oh, occupying yourself with something that'll make you forget that momentary mood. Like the old saying goes, spilt milk, never worry about it, you can't pick it up, so forget about it, get it out of your mind. Unfortunately I think that's the whole trick to any handicap or disability—to find something that you're interested in and, you've always got a goal to reach. You get yourself a goal and keep yourself occupied and you're pretty well set.

### Falling in with Permissive Attitudes

Just to treat us as another guy, and if they don't like what you say, tell you about it, don't accept it—now that's another thing people do, they won't come back at you and tell you—they agree with you and just pass it off, although they don't really agree with you.

And there are some people, I imagine—but on the whole I doubt if the blind really do take advantage of their position, because many people snub you—if you're going to live in a sighted world, you might as well live in a sighted world and not be ignored, you can be. Because once you start taking advantage of people, they're going to ignore you and leave you alone.

A lot of blind individuals do take advantage of their blindness. I mean, I'll be frank with you, I think a lot of blind individuals do play the sympathy angle, concerned with themselves to a great degree, and those individuals are as sick as an individual that has diabetes or high blood pressure—well, high blood pressure's not a disease they tell me—as an individual that has diabetes or pneumonia or needs psychological attention. That's all it is. As any sighted person that you would—would play on the sympathy, become a hypochondriac overnight and plays on the sympathy of his family, he also needs psychological attention. I don't think that his blindness has anything to do with the sympathy angle. I think this man has been trying to—long time to find a way where he could get sympathy or get some attention. And he's been sick before he went blind, psychologically, I mean. But this is an outlet, he has found a way to find sympathy and he uses his blindness.

I think that there's a great danger of a blind person becoming very spoiled and difficult to get along with. I think—I think it's particularly true where he's not—he's not busy—he doesn't have a useful occupation, he doesn't feel that he's going anywhere, has any objective.

One trouble that I've had is that—I've found that my manners deteriorated very badly during the first several months, because—well, I was in a continual state of irritation for one thing—and another thing, nobody had the courage to slap me down for saying things which I obviously shouldn't have said. So that it took me a little while to start holding myself in check on many of these things.

Well, let's go back a little further than that. First—I didn't know this was happening to me, but I thought it would be interesting to you, but I think that I acquired an aggressiveness I didn't have before, a sort of bravado. And I didn't know it until about two years later when my friends finally broke down and told me I was an s. o. b. at a bar—hadn't realized it. Very frank and outspoken and what you might call overindependent, and, never having been that way before, it came as quite a shock to me. Of course, I never let anybody kick me around. He finally told me I was the nastiest s. o. b. he'd ever run into. So that is the part I have tried to correct.

## Routine

You become an exacting individual, a perfectionist so to speak, because you must, in order to be where you're going at the right time and in good shape. That's what annoys people, this perfectionism, this desire—you can't desire it, it won't work. You can't get, you never will get it. You try to get it in your home, you run into a million frustrations, because people don't live that way. You become a creature of extreme habit. You follow routines—oh, I might say, passionately—you don't want them upset either.

Of course, as you know a blind man makes his own patterns and he follows them religiously, because he knows he's going to get there even though it takes him a little



longer and he may have a bit of trouble, he knows he's going to get there and he's not going to shortcut once he's made up his path. Well, this guy keeps arguing with me about taking shortcuts and I refuse to take them because I know damn well some day, he's not going to be there and I'm going to be lost.

You put an ash tray down, or you come to sit in your favorite chair, where there's usually an ash tray and then you sit down and light up a cigarette and you reach over and the ash tray isn't there—well, my wife could go out and spend a thousand dollars on a mink coat and I wouldn't even open my mouth, but God damn it, those ash trays make me mad.

### Conclusion

It should be emphasized that the interview guide was designed primarily for purposes of exploration, and the foregoing material was presented merely to illustrate various areas significant in the analysis of blindness. The major effort was directed toward feeling out these more sensitive regions, rather than to a searching examination of crucial internal relationships, or a rigorous testing of statistical uniformities. This latter approach would necessitate some reshaping of the interview guide or the use of a more structured technique. It would also necessitate the inclusion of a sample more nearly representative of that segment of the blind population under consideration. As set forth here, however, certain statements of a generalized character can be made and some weight assigned to the responses of the various subjects. The emerging patterns will, of course, be colored by the uniqueness of the individual respondent, and the generalizations will extend only to a highly restricted fragment of the blind population.

There was a marked tendency on the part of all respondents to express awareness of their marginal position and

reaction took place within this general frame. For some, the early stages of rehabilitation were crucial and lent direction to their life efforts. The shift in society's attitudes was fully recognized as they moved from the status of blinded soldier to that of blind man. However, the effect of this shift and its meaning displayed greater variation. Of major concern was the impact of blindness upon family relationships. For many, the flood of emotion, oversupport and permissiveness tended to mar the interpersonal flow, further complicating difficult problems of adjustment. The warm solicitous atmosphere left the blinded individual in an essentially dependent state, sharply distorting his definition of self and situation. Much of what is left unsaid in other status relationships is permitted to surface within the family and there was a uniform flux of emotion when the area was under discussion.

Occupational disenfranchisement was of central concern. The area was often spontaneously brought up or evoked intense interest. Although most of the subjects fully recognized the added responsibility of employers, there was a uniform belief that, given the opportunity, they could demonstrate their worth. A few were concerned with the problems of self-enhancement as they engaged the occupational role with a unique balance of capacity and limitation. From these and other responses it was apparent that most of the subjects did not passively accept the definitions found in the larger society. Rather, they more often fell back upon internal resources for the evaluation of their own behavior. There is always the dynamic interplay between the individual and the social press. For the blinded individual, however, this interplay emerges as a pivotal feature of his newly assigned role, since it is impossible to reorganize completely the self-regarding attitudes and habitual patterns of action which have been built up as a noninjured person. Other and less general aspects of occupational adjustment concern the



re-employed. From the little that could be gathered, both subjects falling into this category were apparently confronted by company paternalism. While the tendency was toward acceptance of these patterns, the subjects varied sharply as to the degree of compliance.

Pity, the core emotional response, was universally condemned and tended sharply to damage those individuals who must work out their lives within this framework. It was strongly rejected since the implied evaluation struck at the core of the self-portrait. There was widespread sensitivity to its manifestation. The sheer lack of knowledge concerning the blind constitutes yet another major focus. Routine actions evoked amazement, and communication itself was made difficult since discussions lacked a wholly common base of information. Most of the subjects felt that responsibility for filling in these voids in the pattern of social awareness fell to them. While rejection, isolation and loneliness were prominent in the interview material, some of the subjects also emphasized an unhealthy fascination in the blind and blindness. A striking proportion of the sample were keenly aware of their minority group status and were concerned with segregation as well as efforts toward greater participation.

In exploring the impact of blindness upon the self, the subjects tended to display patterns which were consistent with their evaluation of the surrounding attitudes and beliefs. Most explicitly recognized their difference as it is bound in with the inalterable physical losses that stem directly from the injury. However, they uniformly protest that this difference in degree should not be translated into a difference in kind where the disability, rather than their common humanity, becomes the controlling feature of classification. The attempt on their part is to structure relationships toward interactive normalcy. However, they vary sharply as to the level of integration sought. Further varia-

tion was found along the dimensions of dependence-independence, with the loss of physical mobility a primary concern.

Categorical rejection of help is evidently not a prominent response even in those areas of acknowledged competence. The force of the role as it is traditionally assigned is such that it tends to overwhelm the subjects' attempts at defining a unique range of capacity and limitation. Some passively accept the help, as a part of the more traditional relationship. Others grow callous and fall in with the help as it is offered. For most, acceptance involves strain, ambivalence and some level of irritation. The response is blunted in its expression, however, since they recognize that these clumsy attempts at help represent the best efforts on the part of the sighted individual to be of real assistance. Thus the conflict does not merely reflect the heavy stress that society places upon independence, as it is contrasted with the intrinsic dependence of blindness, but it also reflects a clash of definition where unwarranted help is imposed by a sighted majority who cannot be defined as legitimate targets of aggression. Still other pressures toward acceptance of help stem from recognition of a certain loss of capacity, as well as concern for other and perhaps less competent blind individuals. The latter concern may be a necessary cloak in a difficult situation or a sincere manifestation of in-group solidarity. The refusal of help, it is believed, tends to alienate segments of the public, a public which must be relied upon by all at least some of the time. Responsibility for redefining the conflicting definitions of the situation was generally thought to be a necessary feature of the blinded individual's role. Several of the subjects strongly asserted that it was up to them to take the initiative in interpersonal relationships. In a sense the burden of demonstrating capability was extended to include the need to justify acceptance itself.



As indicated earlier, the minority's tolerance of the majority characterizes much of the material and many latent emotions are apparently rechanneled in their overt expression or rarely displayed. Various responses throughout the several categories illustrate this theme. Deviations here are primarily found in the individual's more general approach to his blindness rather than in the common pattern of tolerance toward the sighted majority. Some of the subjects attempt to put others at their ease through a sympathetic redefinition of blindness as a difficult but not disastrous handicap. The approach of other subjects, however, is to put the self at ease through a display of their blindness which acknowledges their inferior status, then employs this acknowledgement as justification for acceptance and equality in a novel relationship. In parading their blindness, the attempt is to build up a unique kind of solidarity, where the disabled individual has the right of access to the best of both worlds. The following remark made by one of the subjects will serve to nail this complex distinction. "You turn around in a real joking way, you know, and say, 'You're looking real good today'—you know what I mean—this puts you on a real nice basis with them." Thus, the playful acknowledgement has transformed the relationship into a paradox, where blindness both matters and does not. It tends to elicit a profound sympathy while maintaining the fiction of straight across-the-board relationships.

Awareness of reversal of roles was not widespread, and was explicitly mentioned by only a few subjects. Turning the stereotype back upon the self, however, was a prominent feature of the various responses. A few still punished themselves with a built-in stereotype of the blind, while for most this response was characteristic only of the early stages. The stereotype was often employed, however, in understanding how the sighted feel in their relationships with the blind.

Denial was not a prominent mechanism and was sparingly employed. Only one of the respondents could be almost wholly characterized by this pattern of strain reduction. Mechanisms which were prominent in the present material and common to other marginal roles would include compulsive status striving, withdrawal and passive acceptance. Understanding or a sensitive awareness of their unique situation was an adjustive technique that characterized many of the subjects. Their responses were commonly marked by a sophistication which seemed to let them relate to others in a manner which permitted both rejection and partial fulfillment of the norms thought appropriate to the blind. Thus, overt performance within the role and covert acceptance of the role often varied sharply.

Fear of being spoiled or falling in with the surrounding permissive attitudes marked many of the interviews. Some recognized that in elaborating new definitions of their situation, they would be forced to develop internal checks on their own behavior if these definitions were to gain sway. The more traditional definitions of the role would be made up of a strikingly different balance of rights and obligations, tending to permit expression of emotion and behavior that would sharply conflict with attempts at a higher level of integration. Finally, for some the complexity of problems surrounding routine emerged as a prominent feature of their relation to blindness.



## CHAPTER VII

### Blindness and the Role of Companion

Evoking deep and complex emotions, blindness tends to throw up barriers which effectively separate those who are blind from others in the society. Relationships are commonly distorted by a sheer lack of knowledge or filtered through a stereotypical framework. But the blind, like other marginal groupings, do engage in certain interpersonal relations which are unmarred by the introduction of stereotypical responses. Such associations, however, are rare in their experience, for in relating casually to a blind acquaintance, the sighted individual will be faced with the difficult task of relearning where aspects of the stereotype have become ingrained. He must rework his fund of social knowledge concerning blindness and lay aside those notions which are commonly linked to the image of the blind beggar. These might include a certain spiritual quality, an assumed sixth sense, or other compensatory attitudes such as a mystical talent for music.

Moreover, he may be involved in the attempt to control primitive psychological forces as well as other behavior, such as overidentification and projection. He must certainly have some capacity for individuated thinking, and some desire to understand, not only the blind individual's range of limitation, but also his much broader range of capability. Learning, of course, must take place on both sides of the relationship, for the blind individual, as well as his companion, must adjust to a unique interpersonal flow.

It should be stressed that the blinded person under consideration is one who is oriented to full participation in the main currents of the larger society. He strives to fashion his attitudes and behavior in a manner which is roughly

similar to that of the noninjured. Rejecting the passivity and tragic dependence commonly associated with his role, he energetically pursues a more active path. Just as there are many levels of role activity which can be associated with the status of Negro, so a blinded individual can raise his own role definition to a level of heightened functioning. These efforts will meet with limited success, however, for while he may overcome or modify many of the losses involved in blindness, still others are intrinsic to the disability and resist change. These inherent disadvantages will, of course, color the interpersonal process and stamp it as unique.

Lack of eye contact and the inability to respond to gestures or other conversational cues are but two of the many limitations shared by the blind and their sighted companions. Since the blind can do little to fill in these areas of intrinsic loss, a heavy burden rests on the companion who must sensitize himself to these fixed disadvantages and make appropriate behavioral adjustments. He must recognize that the blind have neither the ready access to scraps of information gleaned from current literature, nor the awareness of the physical environment which forms the basis of much informal conversation. If the companion succeeds in contributing sufficiently to the areas of intrinsic loss, and if the blind individual compensates his companion by maximizing his own contribution in those areas where blindness does not offer such stringent limitations, an ongoing relationship having essential equality can be elaborated.

One of the unique contributions of the blind, for instance, may be the somewhat unusual perspective from which they view their society. Marginal by definition, a blind individual can offer his companion a variety of new insights concerning the interpersonal process. This contribution may be accepted in a symmetrical relationship, with the sighted person filling in those areas which are essentially



dependent upon sight as well as insight. The process of social exchange is, of course, not unique to relationships in which one member is culturally defined as handicapped. For every individual has his particular range of social talents and limitations, and will thus make diverse contributions to any interactive relationship. While not singular, the play and counterplay which involve a blind individual is distinctly different from the normal model in terms of the kinds of areas subject to limitation and the greater number of areas falling into this range. These differences, coupled with the permanent character of many of the disadvantages, heighten the possibility that the social exchange between blind and sighted may become disfigured, growing to resemble a purchase rather than a warm interpersonal relationship.

The distinction between interpersonal warmth and a purchase is to be found in the tone and quality of the participants' attitudes rather than in the exchange content itself. Simmel employs the concept of purchase to point up the essential inequality of an asymmetrical exchange.<sup>1</sup> The relationship has a monetary character, stemming from the implication that the actions involved can be compared or juxtaposed only through the imposition of some kind of value other than their common humanity. Simmel continues the analysis in the following statement: "Two individuals offer one another different parts of their inner lives. Gratitude for the gift is realized in a different coin, as it were, and this injects something of the character of purchase into the exchange which is inappropriate in principle."<sup>2</sup>

In another passage he further explores the concept of purchase in interaction, as well as that of an interactive re-

<sup>1</sup> Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated by Kurt H. Wolff, Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1950, p. 390.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

lationship which is reciprocal in nature: "This feeling of a certain inadequacy or indignity, however, arises only if the reciprocal offerings appear as isolated objects of exchange, if the mutual gratitude concerns only the benefits, the exchanged contents, themselves so to speak. But man is not the merchant of himself, and particularly not in the relationships discussed here. His qualities, the powers and functions which emanate from him, do not simply lie before him like merchandise on a counter. It is most important to realize that, even if an individual gives only a particular item, offers only one side of his personality, he may yet wholly be in this side, may yet give his personality completely in the form of this single energy or attribute, as Spinoza would say. This disproportion appears only if the relation has become differentiated to a point where the gift is severed from the giver's total personality. If this is not so, however, it is precisely in these cases that a wonderfully pure instance of a phenomenon emerges which is, otherwise, not very frequent: of gratitude as the reaction equally to the benefit and to the benefactor."<sup>3</sup>

It is necessary for the companion and the blinded individual to actively form or achieve this latter kind of reciprocally oriented relationship if stability in the interactive process is to be attained. It must be emphasized that the stability sought here is not the order of stability that might be assumed if the blinded individual had accepted and was playing out the stereotypical role, and his companion held a system of stereotyped expectations which would roughly gear in with the behavior of his blinded acquaintance. Rather, the level of stability desired is of a more complex character where the interactive process itself serves to construct new definitions of the situation. Beliefs anchored in the stereotype must be cast aside and attitudes refashioned in a manner appropriate to the emerging relationship. More

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.



traditional modes of action may have to be drastically reworked, and alterations will take place in normative patterns customarily shared in the larger society, as well as in the meaning and use of symbols, such as gestures or other social signals common to the culture. Unstructured situations will be a permanent feature of the relationship, and they must be met and dealt with if some level of integration and stability is to be achieved.

Initially, the situation of action will be defined in large part by the blind individual. The necessity to alter stereotypical concepts, coupled with the sheer lack of knowledge concerning blindness, implies that the role of social innovator will fall primarily to the disabled member of the relationship. The blind individual must make rather complex definitions of his situation of action, interpreting the behavior of significant others as it impinges upon his own. In assuming this role, the blind person must in some sense reverse the downward flow of action that is customarily his lot when engaging others in the society. While there are many barriers to be overcome in the building of an integrated relationship, it is critical to eventual stability that the companion be able to accept the blind individual as teacher, along with the status implications of that role. Thus a high degree of flexibility and receptivity is necessary on the companion's part.

Once some degree of integration has been achieved, and a relationship which is subcultural in character has evolved, the companion finds himself playing out an extremely complex social role, a role which is often laden with conflict. He will soon become aware of the hard stares and frowns directed toward him as he attempts to relate casually to his blind friend. Playful roughhousing, heated arguments, light sarcasm, all lack the funereal quality thought appropriate to relationships with the blind. When these and other evidences of reciprocity appear, they may be subtly but

firmly condemned. Others will exert the pressure of the stereotype against the companion in a collective attempt to modify his behavior. These uninitiated persons utilize the same fundamental mechanisms of control which operate in any group situation when one of its members has assumed a deviant position.

The group pressures are, in effect, collective enforcement of stereotypical behavior, tending to pull the companion back into the larger orbit of society. In illustration, we can locate the blind individual and his companion among a group of uninitiated others, and assume that their response to the situation will be colored by the stereotype of the blind. The focus will be upon a broad range of limitations, which, it is believed, tend to cripple the blind individual in most areas of routine functioning. Further, they may feel that, when a blind person is companioned, the companion will initiate most of the action for him. In a specific situation, for instance, the companion who recognizes that the blind person is fully capable of finding his own coat in a crowded hallway may let him proceed. The companion is then placed under the onus of "heartlessness" by the uninitiated group. Succumbing to pressure, the companion finally overassists the blind individual, who thereupon turns on him for being overhelpful and stressing an assumed range of limitation. Thus, the companion is punished by both parties and discouraged from behaving in a reciprocal manner in group situations.

The example outlined above illustrates how an area of competence may be denied to the blind person or overridden through the enforcement of stereotypical behavior by the larger collectivity. In other collective situations, such as entering a restaurant for a meal, the companion is abruptly reminded of his friend's disability by the behavior of waitresses and customers. Again, if the blind-sighted pair joins a group of sighted individuals, the conversation



may shift into neutral areas, or conversely may be concerned only with blindness. In either case, the actions will tend to emphasize the uniqueness of the blind and their distance from the group. More subtly, there has been a shift in orientation; the blind person's difference has been pointed up, and the companion's frame of reference undergoes a spontaneous change. It becomes increasingly difficult to maintain that subcultural definition of the situation which has been worked out in prolonged interchange between the companion and the blind individual. The novel definition is a precarious one which has been nurtured in more isolated, and in a sense, more sheltered, contexts. The companion's reference group in these public situations tends to become the larger society, rather than the blind-sighted dyad, and he begins to reshape his attitudes, evaluations and behavior back toward approved stereotypical norms.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, these group points of reference influence the companion's self-evaluation so that he may be forced to question his own "difference" as demonstrated by his unusual intimacy with the blind.

The reciprocal relationship, it must be stressed, arises from a blend of intellectual exchange and less explicit emotional cues. Because it is unusual and finely balanced, the brunt of gross social reality may send the stereotype crashing through to upset this subtle and hard won equilibrium. The companion must thus embody a paradoxical combination of qualities. He must be receptively passive enough to learn the singular modes of reciprocal interaction, yet aggressive enough to hold fast to this definition and resist the group pressures toward a relapse into stereotypical conformity.

<sup>4</sup> Robert K. Merton, Alice S. Kitt, "Contributions to the Theory of Reference Group Behavior," in Robert K. Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, editors, *Continuities in Social Research: Studies in the Scope and Method of "The American Soldier,"* Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1950, pp. 40-105.

Collective enforcement of stereotypical behavior is seen again in the ambiguous position of the companion when accompanying the blind individual. Others are confused because they do not know whether to react to the latter directly or through the mediation of the companion. A waitress, for instance, may solve the problems of interaction by simply turning to the companion and saying, "What does he want?" At some later stage when the blind individual and his companion have become familiar figures in the restaurant, the very same waitress may channel all her conversation and activities toward the blind person. As a result, one or the other is often ignored. Few persons know how to encompass both in the same universe of social action, since they have "special" behavior for the blind which is incompatible with the presence of a third party. Communication may be directed wholly to the companion, directed primarily to the blind individual, or channelled through the companion as mediator. While most triadic communication is undoubtedly asymmetrical, the presence of blindness lends added increments of strain. Any of the alternative distortions of communication tend to exert negative influence on the reciprocal orientation of the companion. On the other hand, there is the possibility here, as in all situations described, that the companion will be inspired by the gauche behavior of the uninitiated to redouble his own tenacity. He may hold strenuously to his definition of reciprocity, even flaunting it in a way which alienates the uninitiated third person.

Uninformed others constantly remind the companion of his blind friend's disability and block his reciprocal inclinations. This implies that the companion is inevitably faced with a choice in which he has to decide whether to defy the collectivity, paying the price of reciprocity, or else adhere to the group's stereotype of the blind. This dual allegiance, however, need not always flare into overt conflict.



For the intensity of choice may diminish over time as the groups involved grow more fully acquainted with the definition of the situation as it is exemplified by the companion and the blind individual. Further, the anguish involved in choice would also be diminished if the blind person renounced areas of capability and assumed a dependent state. While his commitment to dominant values makes this unlikely, under some limited set of conditions he may do so grudgingly. For, in certain circumstances, the compelling force of the socially assigned role is such that it overwhelms the blind individual as well as his companion and forces the behavior of both back toward approved stereotypical norms. The owner of a bar, for instance, may say to the companion, "That's OK, chief, it's on the house," and since it is hard to refuse the offer without seeming ungrateful, it becomes extremely difficult to alter the bartender's definition of the situation.

Moreover, the companion has at his disposal various alternatives which, at worst, would not evoke sanctions from either the blind individual or the surrounding group.<sup>5</sup> Referring back to the coat situation in illustrating this point, the companion might quickly pick out the blind individual's coat, roughly shoving it into his hands with a laughing, "Damn it all, why don't you hurry the hell up!" This maneuver offends neither side and constitutes a middle course. Still other possibilities are open to the companion in his attempt to minimize the clash of definitions. In choosing one of these, however, the companion has necessarily lost an opportunity to affirm his belief in the capabilities of the blind; and if freely used, these alternative solutions will tend to erode the subcultural relationship so carefully worked through.

Nevertheless, this does not change the major point that

<sup>5</sup> Jackson Toby, "Some Variables in Role Conflict Analysis," *Social Forces*, Vol. XXX, March, 1952, pp. 323-327.

the companion, while accompanying his blind friend, is thrust into a position of conflicting group memberships, and must resist the coercive forces of the stereotype if he is to maintain a reciprocal tie with the blind individual. If the companion has accepted as legitimate his friend's expectations concerning his role, he is caught in a conflict situation. He must either compromise the expectations of the group or those of the blind person, or, finally, throw in his lot with one set of expectations or the other. Complete fulfillment of both sets is obviously impossible, as would be a middle course in many situations. Negative sanctions will be forthcoming from either the group or the blind person if their expectations are sacrificed.

On other, deeper levels the companion may experience personality conflict. As in the earlier description of coat hunting in a crowded hallway, the conflict has a patterned character stemming from the companion's overlapping group memberships, and thus fits the type case of role conflict entailed by dual allegiance. Basically, the dilemma is imposed by the lack of integration between two contrasting definitions of the situation; one ordered to a stereotype, the other to an idiosyncratic compact of companion and blind individual.

Uninitiated others may make false assumptions concerning the motivational process that underlies the companion's status. They may, for instance, admire him for his altruism rather than for his mastery of a complicated social role. Reciprocity has not been achieved through a generous application of Christian values on the part of the companion, but through his willingness to respond to the challenge of a difficult learning process. A display of emotion at any stage of the developing interactive pattern would destroy any potential reciprocal relationship. On the contrary, a certain toughness, rather than sympathy, is more nearly an imperative for the companion, and few could do worse than the blatant "do-gooder."



Playing the role invites a range of projective responses from others in the society which tend to be more active when the companion is female. This range runs the gamut from naked curiosity to a simpering kind of "Isn't that nice" smile. In any case, there is a heightened interest in the relationship existing between the two individuals, as well as in the individuals themselves. Although the role of companion is a distinctly new psychological experience for most persons in the culture, there are other roles which have a parallel structure despite sharp differences in manifest content. Discussions with a white girl engaged to a Negro, whose associations were predominantly in white society, brought to light some points markedly similar to aspects of the situation presented here. In her companion role, she often found herself ordered to a limbo, with the overt group interest centered in her Negro fiance, while under other conditions, mediation was a prominent feature of her role, as it is with the companion of the blind.

Seemingly disparate roles of this character may be analyzed in process terms through the application of a single theoretical structure, and resulting uniformities may illuminate or modify role conceptualizations. Certain roles, for example, may be surrounded by substantial overt structures of attitudes or expectations, while others may be the object of a mass of covert attitudes and expectations. The kind of attitudinal matrix surrounding the companion of the blind has obvious implications for his subjective role definition, since the excess of implicit attitudes may serve to heighten or cloak the ambivalence which he must inevitably experience.

In his role, the companion necessarily assumes an obligation to combat manifestations of the stereotype, and the task will bring him into direct opposition with those who embrace the modal or dominant pattern which is linked into the stereotypical structure. As he attempts to change society's view of the blind individual's situation or its atti-

tude toward the blind, he confronts a composite of problems that anyone meets who tries to change or redefine social attitudes and opinions. These problems have been analyzed by Festinger, Schachter and Back, and in pointing up one of the difficulties in altering social attitudes they state: "We must then examine the determinants of whether or not the communication of an opinion will change the opinion of a person to whom the communication is made—that is, under what conditions will the communication of an opinion be effective? The hypothesis may be advanced that the 'social reality' upon which an opinion or attitude rests for its justification is the degree to which the individual perceives that this opinion or attitude is shared by others. An opinion or attitude which is not reinforced by others of the same opinion will become unstable generally. There are not usually compelling facts which can unequivocally settle the question of which attitude is wrong and which is right in connection with social opinions and attitudes as there are in the case of what might be called 'facts'."<sup>6</sup>

To apply the hypothesis here, the companion, surrounded by a stereotypically oriented group, lacks the social support needed to redefine the situation in a manner which is meaningful or acceptable to the group. They may feel strongly that the blind are not capable of doing very much at all and that what is most required is a solicitous guiding hand and a sympathetic tone of voice. Thus the validity of the companion's opinion finds no base in the community of attitudes and may be defined as incorrect. The authors continue by stating: "Indeed, there will be forces to reject the new opinion since its acceptance would mean moving away from the group in which one has one's 'social reality' anchored."<sup>7</sup> However, the companion's difficulties in main-

<sup>6</sup> Leon Festinger, Stanley Schachter, Kurt Back, *Social Pressures in Informal Groups*, New York, Harper and Bros., 1950, p. 168.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.



taining a variant position in the group are not as marked as they might be if he were playing other deviant or variant roles within the society, since humanitarian values are in effect. For while these values may serve as points of reference for a misinterpretation of the relationship, they also serve to sharply reduce the range of sanctions that can be imposed on those who have stationed themselves in this novel position.

It has been observed that others both allow and expect a companion to initiate a great many actions for the blind individual. He is expected to take a protective or nurturant role which dictates that he be constantly at the blind individual's side. This assumption may tend to limit the companion's normal behavior of alternately engaging many different group members in a social situation and drastically restrict his freedom of movement. Moreover, the companion has a real obligation to assist the blind person in areas of incapacity, and when the setting involves a plurality of individuals the assistance assumes a more one-sided character than when the two are isolated. The help is silhouetted over against regular or routine patterns of behavior and the losses associated with the disability grow angular and acquire exaggerated meaning.

From quite another direction, we find a final pressure introducing strain into the companion's situation of action. The tension stems from the inability of the blind individual to navigate in group situations. The independence achieved by using a cane or some other technique is lost, for he cannot maintain the pace or keep in the appropriate spatial relationship while walking with two or three people, unless he takes the arm of one of them. If there are four people including a blind individual and his companion, all the usual factors involved in pairing off, while walking, are overridden by the fact of blindness. The assumption that the blind person will always take the companion's arm, regard-

less of other pressures in the pairing off process, such as the momentary flow of conversation, may introduce abnormality into the spatial positions of the group. Similarly, if there are three people including the companion and his blind acquaintance, the third person often compulsively overassists the blind individual in an effort to become a part of the solidary pair formation.

The companion does have certain resources at his disposal in combating the stereotype, or minimizing these strains. Festinger, *et al.* have examined a situation in which attitudes and beliefs lack stability. They state that, "If the group anchorage for an opinion or attitude is not firm, however, the situation is quite different. Under such circumstances the attitudes and opinions are unstable and fluid and the process of communication proceeds to establish this social reality of commonly shared opinions and attitudes."<sup>8</sup> This, of course, is often the case in relation to the blind. Not only do most people lack knowledge concerning blindness, but they further assume that the companion of the blind has access to this special kind of knowledge. While the assumption is not groundless, it is often overlaid with a certain mystical import. It is not simply inferred that the companion, working through the normal processes of communication, has come to understand an individual, his motivations, goals and situation of action. It is thought rather that the companion has a unique type of personality, or possibly special training, as in the case of the social worker, which enables him to relate casually to a blind individual. However, there remains the assumption that the companion somehow knows or understands the blind, and this fact can be considered a resource placed at the companion's disposal in combating the stereotype. The leverage so provided can be used as a weapon on those areas of the stereotype that are vague, amorphous and fluid.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.



The companion's status vis-a-vis the group affords a further point of leverage. If he enjoys a relatively high status, communications to group members concerning the blind person will have a better chance of acceptance. Others may for any number of reasons be more readily able to accept reciprocally oriented cues from the sighted companion than from the blind individual. Moreover, the mere fact of his prolonged association will also have an impact on preconceived attitudes toward the blind. There is, of course, the ever present danger that the blind individual will be transformed from "blind beggar" to "blind genius," partly through a halo effect from a well regarded companion. Where formerly the blind individual could do nothing at all, he now, holding the status of genius, can do literally everything! The danger also exists that he may become little more than a shadow of his sighted companion and completely lose his uniquely personal or social identity.

In the discussion of the communication process, we have emphasized those pressures that tend to promote conformity in interpersonal relations, drawing members who hold a variant or deviant position into the modal orientation of the group. This is essentially the core conception in sociology, the impact of the society upon the individual. The discussion, however, has also stressed certain facilities at the disposal of the companion in his attempt to redefine the situation or the basis on which action is patterned. Further, emphasis has been placed upon various mechanisms which tend to minimize conflicting pressures which are brought to bear when the individual assumes a variant position. The companion, for instance, may be insulated from the full shock of some of the forces by a rather arbitrary separation of his roles. He may, that is, fill a double role and be accepted in it differentially. If group members do not try to merge his roles as companion and as representative of the sighted majority, he may achieve clear-cut acceptance in

each area of his total behavior, being judged on the basis of appropriate and relevant criteria. In some groups, moreover, nonconformity might itself be highly valued, which would have implications for the position of both the blind individual and his companion, as well as for the degree of acceptance given to their definition of a blind person's situation of action. But this is probably a rare occurrence, and the primary consideration is still the coercive pressures, flowing from a surrounding group of stereotypically oriented others, which the companion must somehow meet in order to maintain his reciprocal tie with his blind friend. The same coercive forces, of course, also come into play when the group opinion is modelled on an opposite premise. If the blind person is surrounded by a plurality of companions who are themselves reciprocally oriented, they can induce a single individual, burdened with the stereotype, yet desirous of entering the group, to conform with the modal reciprocal pattern.

Throughout the discussion difficulties met in the role of companion have been stressed, since description and analysis must proceed from recognition of this harsh fact. Those who are familiar with the more active blind, however, point up various positive rewards which help to mitigate the impact of sanctions, rewards that tend to heighten the rich ebb and flow of any profound interpersonal relationship. Perhaps chief among these is the sense of achievement and satisfaction which attends completion of a complex learning task. The companion has been called on to revise his behavior in an emotion-filled and sometimes threatening realm, and this challenge, when successfully met, brings forth a real sense of accomplishment. Further, a feeling of power undoubtedly accrues to the companion who has access to special knowledge about the blind. Although this knowledge is not esoteric, being available to any individual who takes the trouble to master it, it is quite apart from



the ordinary run of cultural experience. This places the schooled companion in the position of interpreter and may cast him in the role of a vital social link. For while conscious altruism is damaging, there is a genuine sense in which a companion realizes he has made a certain social contribution and advanced the cause of the more open society by helping to unblock one significant interpersonal relationship.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Exclusion, Mediation, and Reciprocity

#### Generalized Statement and Major Hypothesis

The purpose of this experiment is to analyze a situation in which action of central concern to a blind individual is diverted instead to his companion, casting the companion in the role of mediator. The underlying hypothesis is that in a particular setting, a retail purchase, the store clerk will tend to include the sighted companion in his interaction with the blind purchaser, or even to focus on the companion to the virtual exclusion of the blind individual. If the hypothesis is correct, deviations on the clerk's part from the normal sales situation will occur in one or more directions, and will extend to those areas of potential interaction where blindness imposes no intrinsic limitation.

#### The Problem

The store clerk in a situation involving a blind customer may be burdened with a highly structured stereotype of the blind, and these fixed beliefs will tend to distort the conventional interactive process. Paradoxically, other distortions may stem from the clerk's complete lack of resources for dealing routinely with a blind individual who is attempting to play a normal purchasing role. Thus, the clerk usually brings to the situation an inadequate but rigid conception of the blind, or a vague hesitancy based on the absence of both knowledge and previous experience. Perhaps most often both features of the stereotypical response are found in the same person, producing vacillation or instability in the interpersonal process.



The clerk's lack of resources implies that a learning challenge will be created by the blind individual's entrance into the scene. This challenge, however, may not be fully accepted, since the purchaser's companion can be viewed by the clerk as a readily available channel for the mediation of behavior, insulating him from the raw shock of direct interaction. When the companion refuses to play the role of mediator, the clerk is forced into a new psychological situation, and may be compelled to deal independently with his blind customer.

Social psychological experience suggests some of the responses that may occur in situations where the subject must react to an unfamiliar and somewhat threatening stimulus.<sup>1</sup> Since orientation is scant and the perceptual structure is unstable, the clerk may swing from caution to boldness and back again. He will experience the errors and false steps which are a frustrating part of any difficult learning process. Feelings of both positive and negative valence may impel him to try to advance and withdraw at the same time. Self-conscious inhibition induces tension and leads to inappropriate extremes of behavior. Blindness, moreover, often has a pronounced emotional impact, evoking feelings of both sympathy and pity. In this setting it introduces a fund of affect which is normally excluded from the market transaction. The exchange relationship implies a norm of affective neutrality, the withholding of full interpersonal commitment which any store clerk must practice in self-defense.<sup>2</sup> This aspect of the purchase relationship may be overridden or at least may become a less effective restraint when blindness is involved, tending further to complicate a difficult situation.

<sup>1</sup> R. G. Barker, B. A. Wright, M. R. Gonick, *Adjustment to Physical Handicap and Illness: A Survey of the Social Psychology of Physique and Disability*, New York: Social Science Research Council, Bulletin 55, 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, Glencoe, Ill. The Free Press, 1951.

At length, the clerk may feel strongly that the blind purchaser and sighted companion require a pattern of differential response so that his system of categorization, or set, cannot encompass both of them in a single universe of interaction. In clinging tenaciously to this stereotypical definition, the clerk may wholly exclude the blind purchaser from the interactive flow and force a paired relationship with the companion. Even the refusal of the companion to react in the role of mediator may be ignored or overridden and the clerk will continue to channel much of his behavior in the companion's direction. A further pressure attracting the clerk to the companion is the assumption that those accompanying the blind have access to special knowledge, and can thus conveniently be counted on to handle situations of this sort. A similar tendency may be observed in the presence of an extremely sick person where the newcomer takes his cues from those who are in attendance rather than from the ill individual himself.

### Study Design

A blind individual, his companion, and an observer in the role of browsing shopper entered a number of men's furnishing stores where the blind individual asked to be shown a white shirt. A realistic situation was thereby transformed into something approaching a laboratory. The flow of action following the request was observed and categorized by both the companion and the observer who was stationed a few yards away. The purchasing situation was paralleled by a control group consisting of the same companion and observer, with a sighted individual replacing the blind one. The identity of the buyer, then, blind or sighted, was the most prominent single element which varied between the experimental and control groups. Normative behavior was established by the control group and



served as a base line from which to analyze the magnitude and direction of deviance on the part of various clerks in the experimental situation. Partial control was achieved through randomizing the series of stores to be visited by the blind and sighted groups. Twenty men's clothing and furnishing stores were selected. Thirteen stores were visited by the observer, companion and blind individual, while seven were visited by the observer, companion and sighted individual. Role behavior was standardized for the participants by prior training, and was further checked by the observer who remained outside the triad made up of clerk, purchaser and companion. The blind and sighted purchasers were both male while the companion and observer were female. Blindness was made apparent through the use of a cane and dark glasses. Holding the arm of the companion lent further emphasis to the disability.

A philosophy of roles was formulated, describing their major values, points of view, goals and permitted means. This core philosophy enabled the role player to fall back on a generalized orientation when specific behavioral routines proved inadequate.<sup>3</sup> Experience in role playing, as well as in the mechanics of entering and leaving the store, was gained in the pre-tests. A strong effort was made to manipulate the situation toward interactive normalcy, that is, toward reciprocal behavior between clerk and purchaser. The companion was alert to the clerk's overtures, and tried to steer them away from herself toward the purchaser in both the experimental and control situation. A full conception of the roles to be played was thus mandatory, since an inconsistent attitude on the part of any member would obviously alter the research findings.

The philosophies underlying the three roles to be played were as follows:

<sup>3</sup> Marie Jahoda, Morton Deutsch, Stuart W. Cook, *Research Methods in Social Relations*, New York: The Dryden Press, 1951.

### Companion's Role

The companion should manifest an interest in the purchase to be made but in a reserved manner, refraining from spontaneous judgment. She should reject the clerk's attempt to structure the situation as a paired relationship, but only after such efforts are clearly made. Her attitude should be one of interested neutrality, not emotionally disengaged from the scene nor attentive to articles in the store other than the one to be purchased, but on the other hand, not aggressively involved.

### Blind and Sighted Purchaser's Role

He should try to maintain control in the situation, explicitly defining the purchase as a personal one. In this effort, he should phrase all requests in terms of "I" rather than "we." He should aggressively structure the situation toward a dyadic relationship of clerk and purchaser. Any actions of the clerk which have been directed to the companion and deflected by her, should be immediately accepted by the purchaser. The underlying attitude stresses independence and autonomy, and these themes merge in the positive drive to limit critical interaction to the clerk-purchaser pair.

### Observer Role

The observer is psychologically neutral and does not enter the interactive system of companion, buyer and clerk. She should play a browsing role, giving *raison d'être* to her presence, but clearly split off from the other actors. Her observational posture should be as unobtrusive as possible.



### Methods of Data Collection

The basic method employed was participant observation and involved the playing of specified roles. Further, both the companion and the shopper served as observers in each of the several situations, categorizing the actions of the various clerks. Judgments were made about the kind of action initially directed toward the companion or purchaser, as well as throughout the remainder of the purchasing situation. The observer in the companion role focused primarily on the kind and amount of action she received from the clerk, while the observer in the shopper role concentrated on the total purchasing situation as an over-all frame of reference. On entering the store, the companion and the purchaser moved to an open area of the counter where the purchaser asked to be shown a white shirt. The selection of open counter space left the clerk free to place the shirt before either the buyer or the companion, searching one or the other for cues as to the subsequent patterning of his own behavior. If the shirt were placed before the companion, she would move it over in front of the purchaser, effectively deflecting the action of the clerk. His response to this cue would be recorded. The categories of analysis overlaying the interactive flow were checked off immediately after leaving the store. Full agreement on the scoring was required of both companion and observer. The span of action was considered to start from the first contact with the clerk and was terminated as the purchaser said that he would like to look elsewhere before making a decision.

## The Results

## CATEGORIES FOR THE ANALYSIS OF THE CLERK'S BEHAVIOR

	<i>Sighted Purchaser</i>	<i>Blind Purchaser</i>
	N = 7	N = 13
1. Blindness recognized	not appli- cable	13
2. Initially related to companion as instrumental or looked to companion for cues in structuring his own behavior	0	5
3. Initially related to purchaser as instrumental or looked to purchaser for cues in structuring his own behavior	7	6
4. Initially related to neither companion nor purchaser as instrumental	0	2
5. Placed shirt before companion	0	4
6. Placed shirt before purchaser	7	6
7. Held shirt or placed it before no one	0	3
8. Acceptance by clerk of companion's cue in moving shirt before purchaser	0	3
9. Non-acceptance by clerk of companion's cue in moving shirt before purchaser	0	1

## Interpretation and Conclusion

The experiment emphasizes the crucial role of the companion when the blind engage the larger society, since five of the subjects related initially to the companion as terminal or instrumental in a situation that was consciously arranged to stress a paired relationship of the clerk and blind purchaser. Cues offered by the companion were more readily accepted than those offered by the blind individual, and without the companion's support, extreme difficulty would have been met in defining a reciprocal relationship. If left unchecked, thoroughly mediative behavior would, of course, negate the possibility of any real learning in relation to the blind. Those clerks whose actions varied from



the normative model which had been established in the sighted triad, were evidently overwhelmed by the fact of blindness. The purchaser's disability became the dominant cue, and the clerk tended thereafter to order all interaction in terms of the blind individual's inability to see the product. In so doing, he generalized a single area of incapacity and nonreciprocity into a total set of nonreciprocity and found in the companion a readily available channel for the mediation of behavior. One of the clerks, falling into this category, was so focused upon the companion as the terminal member that he overrode the most blatant cues, including the companion's act of moving the shirt over in front of the blind individual. Finally two of the subjects related initially to neither the companion nor the purchaser in the exchange relationship. Their response may be characterized as leaving the field, a pattern of behavior which was not paralleled in the control situation involving a sighted buyer.

It should be stated explicitly, however, that the companion of the sighted purchaser was not wholly excluded from the interaction surrounding the exchange relationship. Often the companion was either encompassed in the clerk's greeting or briefly recognized in the sales segment of the purchase. The clerk might, with his eyes, seek approval of a particular point, or joke about the weather in an attempt to create rapport or solidarity. When the companion was accompanied by the blind purchaser, however, the clerk might remark, "May I help you, Miss?" in striking contrast to the situation where all members of the party were sighted. Questions such as, "Does he want 'thirty-three' sleeves?", directed to the companion, would be judged as defining the companion as both terminal and instrumental in the exchange relationship. It was, then, not the formal inclusion or exclusion of the female companion which distinguished the experimental group from the control group, but rather the degree of inclusion and its content.

Another source of misunderstanding may emerge if the figures presented above are casually weighed and the resulting balance thought to reflect accurately the emotional impact that mediative behavior has upon a blind individual. A full understanding of the emotional facet requires an analysis cast in terms of the larger framework making up the blind person's social ground. To be uncertain of one's reception, to be confronted by spasmodic or vacillating acceptance, is far more disquieting than is uniform or categorical rejection. Mediation, of course, always involves some level of rejection or depreciation and brings into question the blind individual's state of social maturity. The clerks who engaged the blind purchaser from this perspective, then, constitute an important segment of the total sample, whose response may be quantitatively rather small, but qualitatively very significant.

Finally, it should be emphasized that control over the role playing process was limited to the inculcation of the role philosophies sketched above, practice in the several pre-tests, and the judgment of the observer whose position was outside the interactive network. A more definitive experimental design would place several different participants in each of the various roles, so that performance within these roles might be differentially evaluated. Since the novelty of the situation must obviously have intensified the clerk's interest in various cues, there is a heightened possibility that some unconscious gesture by the companion or purchaser tended to move the experimental results in the expected direction.

The present design, however, embodied a first attempt to enumerate and evaluate various complex behavioral orientations. Concern was shown for the situation of action, interactive relationships and the individual behavior of several role players. The aim was to make clean-cut discriminations between exclusion, mediation and reciprocity in a purchasing situation.



## CHAPTER IX

### Blindness and the Interactive Process

Analysis of blindness must proceed from recognition of the blunt fact of functional inadequacy. It is a serious handicap impeding physical movement, awareness and control of the object world, as well as a whole range of routine human action. Built upon or overlaying these intrinsic losses, however, is a pattern of belief which sharply emphasizes the disabled individual's separation from the noninjured. The disability places the blinded individual in a variant social category, as others relate to him in terms of a unique or restricted set of social norms. His relocation at the boundaries of society implies a distortion of the more conventional patterns of action and reaction. Paradoxically, other distortions stem from the lack of clarity or solidity of definition found within the norms thought appropriate to the blind, and their mutual adjustment with other individuals is often marked by a permanence of ill-defined expectations. While indeterminacy mars the interpersonal process, it should be emphasized that the realistic elements involved in blindness, the inalterable physical losses, have been sufficiently elaborated to frame a meaningful social category. Thus the difference in degree of capability found between the blind and the sighted is transformed into a difference in kind, where the handicap rather than common humanity becomes the controlling feature of classification. The blind face a harsh challenge. They must deal and be dealt with in a framework of patterns which imply special and problematic adjustment.

Adjustment involves the building of an acceptable working relationship with both the self and others. It can be best understood as the individual's efforts to cope with situations

laden with strain or to salvage from them whatever is most meaningful. The intensity and direction of these efforts will be determined by a variety of uniquely personal and social pressures. They will necessarily involve the individual's past history, his present situation of action and future expectations. Further, these efforts must take place within a cultural scene which offers in any specific situation a limited range of behavioral possibilities.

Acceptance of a lower level of functioning may also be involved in the process of adjustment. Tied closely to blindness, for instance, are a whole array of losses which resist change or can be only partially modified. Lack of awareness or control and the awkwardness of self will rob the individual of his accustomed ease and leave him troubled and hesitant in areas of life which were formerly routine. These realistic handicaps can, of course, be invested with added increments of emotion or overlaid with uniquely personal anxieties. Still other emotionally charged areas might include mutilation and disfigurement. These strike at the integrity of self, and the extensive physical damage which was so very common among the war blind may involve a painful reconstruction of an adequate body image.

Adjustment must take place on many fronts and at many levels. It is necessarily tied to the blinded individual's web of human relationships and rests upon some admixture of the uniquely irrational meanings attached to the disability and the objective difficulties which are customarily experienced by the blind. A pervading sense of incompetence may be interlarded with various core emotions relating to guilt or moral defection and threat of inherited punishments or dispositions. Still other deprivations may be impending or actual, such as the material loss suffered by the newly blind through occupational disenfranchisement. Vulnerability or helplessness is yet another key theme which will necessarily distort the self-portrait.



Efforts to achieve and adjust must be worked through in a context which commonly involves some degree of help. Help is often unwanted and badly offered. It negates areas of achievement and presses the blinded individual into subordinate roles. Not only does help take away areas of independence, but it goes deeper to destroy the individual's growing conception of self. Even the stereotype may be turned back upon the self, distorting or limiting the blinded individual's definition of the situation. There are, moreover, the minority group aspects of blindness which mean personal rejection and loss of prestige. These will strike cruelly at the individual's sense of belongingness. They will make a shambles of his adjustment if that adjustment is directed toward maintaining the core image of self that was held prior to the disability.

Adjustment necessarily involves a complex system of interpersonal relations, since the structure of the interactive process and the personalities of the actors form an indissoluble network. The blinded individual cannot be understood in isolation from the interactive flow, for much of his uniqueness stems directly from the patterns of action or reaction which make up his social ground. It is essential to simplify this behavioral complex and to employ certain general categories of analysis in the search for uniformities of action. Those who engage a blind individual orient themselves toward him in three distinct modes: the cognitive, cathectic and evaluative.<sup>1</sup> The cognitive mode requires rational judgment as to the characteristics of the individual or object. The cathectic mode involves the relevance of the object to the satisfaction of psychological needs, while the evaluative mode comprises the application of explicit or implicit standards to alternative ways of behaving toward the object. All three, information, emotion and judgment,

<sup>1</sup> Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils, *Toward a General Theory of Action*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1951.

are mobilized with the appearance of an appropriate social object, and are closely interwoven in the immediacy of the interpersonal process.

Identification raises an initial cognitive problem, for while the blind may be readily singled out in most situations, the fact of blindness is often not apparent in the first moments of an encounter. Inappropriate cognitive manoeuvres may be employed before the sighted person realizes the true situation. The realization sometimes occurs only after various gestures have failed to elicit any response from the blinded individual. Once blindness is recognized, however, the sighted individual makes a drastic cognitive shift. He assumes that his usual reactions cannot be appropriately mobilized and searches for the special variety of interactive behavior which he feels is demanded. He is confronted with the question of how to act and turns to his stock of information about the blind. Here he is likely to find gaps in knowledge as well as a fund of misapprehensions. For some, there may be a hesitancy about touching or steering the blind, while for others, the perceived failure to see may be generalized into a gestalt of disability, so that the individual shouts at the blind as if they were deaf or attempts to lift them as if they were crippled. Those confronting the blind may have a whole range of belief that is anchored in the stereotype. For instance, they may think they are subject to unique judgment, assuming the blinded individual draws on special channels of information unavailable to others. The strain introduced might be analogous to that often found when engaging a psychoanalyst in routine conversation. However, the most significant feature of the cognitive realm is the lack of knowledge concerning the blind. The sheer mechanics of interaction may be disrupted, since various social cues or signals are either missing or inappropriate. Much like the individual in a strange culture, the sighted person lacks certain basic skills and often finds that



his accustomed patterns of behavior do not evoke the expected response.

Shifting to cathectic orientations, the presence of the blind may generate a whole complex of feelings and emotions which will tend to disturb the surface flow of action. Blindness has been linked psychoanalytically to various sexual fears such as the anxiety that centers about castration, as well as to the flux of emotion relating to death and darkness. Further, it may be symbolically tied to the figure of the mother or conscience, while at other levels it may be felt that the disability is an affliction or punishment which has been imposed as retribution for some moral transgression. Guilt and ambivalence often characterize the emotional flow as others react to the symbolic content of blindness. It is recognized that the blinded individual may respond to his blindness in a similar manner, but this reverse side of the relationship will not be explored. The emotional response that is directed toward the blind is necessarily filtered through the conventional patterns of solicitous behavior and is distorted or twisted in its expression. Pity is perhaps the core emotional response and illustrates how various feelings are masked in their overt display. It has been interpreted as representing a derivative of the individual's own frustrated dependency needs, in that he reverses roles and treats the object of pity as he desires to be treated himself. Pity has also been analyzed as a reaction-formation against the aggression aroused by the injury and as a defense against the anxiety called forth by the pitiable condition. Finally, pity may be a disguised version of the sighted person's feeling of superior status.

Central in the evaluative mode of orientation is the marginal position of the blinded individual. Through the application of a restricted set of norms, he is relocated at the boundaries of society, and evaluation takes place along a scale which is markedly different from that customarily

employed with the noninjured. His behavior is cast in a framework that permits both overevaluation and under-evaluation, for in this insulated context, his actions become safe objects of pity or praise. It should be stressed again that the evaluative process may be marred by indeterminacy, since the norms felt appropriate to the blind lack clarity or solidity of social definition. The more actively oriented blind reject these definitions and attempt to engage in activities or to play out roles customarily reserved for the noninjured. Their actions, however, will lack social recognition, and they will be left unsupported by the norms of their society. Diverse sources of strain are thus woven into the very fabric of the blinded individual's social relationships.

In addition to the cognitive, cathectic and evaluative modes of orientation, there is an important set of analytical categories which may be used to define the choice points of behavior and to describe various ideal typical interactive situations. These are the pattern variables which identify critical polarities in the selection of potential types of action toward social objects.<sup>2</sup> Among the five sets of paired variables is universalism—particularism, which distinguishes between the application of general rules and the invoking of special or uniquely personal considerations. Performance—qualities concerns the possibility of judging an individual by his actions on a common scale and judging him by personal characteristics. Affective neutrality—affectivity connotes the difference between a controlled or channelled inhibition of emotion and a broader emotional response. Functional specificity—diffuseness distinguishes the performance of limited, well defined duties from responsibility for a more general range of tasks while lastly, the category self-orientation—other-orientation defines the contrasts be-

<sup>2</sup> Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, Glencoe, Ill. The Free Press, 1951.



tween the pursuit of goals for institutionalized self-enhancement and pursuit of communal ends.

These patterned alternatives define the norms which tend to govern the expectations within a specific interactive context. They may be arranged, for instance, to characterize the ideal-typical instrumental or task-oriented relationship. Instrumental relationships are regulated in terms of a pattern variable constellation consisting of universalism, performance, affective neutrality, functional specificity and self-orientation. Emphasis on this arrangement of variables is most pronounced in the role relationships found within the sphere of economics or the world of business. However, the role traditionally assigned to the blind involves norms that are in striking contrast with those appropriate to instrumental relationships, and by placing the more active blind within business or commercial settings, the two sets of norms are brought into bold relief. The following discussion will take the instrumental model as a framework for the analysis of the more actively oriented blind as they attempt to approximate this realm of action central to American society.

The struggle to create the conditions for maximal adherence to instrumental patterns involves a jockeying for position as new norms, particularly those applicable to performance, are constructed. Not only must novel standards and procedures be mutually accepted by the employer and the blinded individual, but selected older norms must be revised to meet the challenge. The natural tendency to embrace affectivity rather than affective neutrality must be recast, as many of the norms undergo a shaping and tailoring toward the unique situation of action. In brief, the instrumental norms are allowed to operate, but with their special modifications and restrictions made clear.

It should be emphasized that most of the modifications will take place in the accepted means of attaining the instrumental norms rather than in the norms themselves.

Thus a blind trainee within an insurance program will pass or fail examinations according to universalistic standards appropriate to all, but special or particularistic arrangements must be made for the reading of the examination. For the employer or executive, it is a case of, "Yes, we judge him as others, but he is, after all, blind." The norms of the ideal instrumental relationship are approximated, but they have been so defined by both parties that each accepts the universe of application of these norms as being limited and restricted to a special class. If this definition is to be securely established or accepted, it is crucial that the employer demonstrate his belief in the venture in front of other employees or bring them into the situation schooled in the idiosyncratic compact. The blind and sighted pair may then be able to carry on a modified instrumental relationship.

As the more actively oriented blind move into an instrumental or commercial setting they become agents of strain in their attempts to insulate and differentiate their relationship with employers from those obtaining in the larger society. A much simpler solution for the executive is to offer the blind individual entry into his organization or group in terms of the traditional role of the blind. Essentially the attempt would be to evolve a paternalistic relationship sharply diverging from instrumental norms. Employers or administrators may want to place the blind in this particular relationship for several reasons. Not only would the more traditional mode of relating to the blind have for them an aura of intrinsic rightness, but also they may find that the traditional relationship provides a solution for the feelings of guilt aroused by the disability. This can be achieved by being able to perform solicitous, other-oriented activities toward the blind. The traditional definition of the relationship as a dependent one allows the sighted to alleviate their own fears of what might happen to them if they were



similarly disabled. This alleviation comes by virtue of the fact that their own actions are helping build up in themselves expectations for other-oriented reactions from the rest of society. Acceptance of the traditional model further protects the sighted employer by obviating the possibility of conflict with other sighted members of the society who adhere to that model of orientation.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the sighted gain and reinforce control over the blind by reasserting the limitations ascribed to the stereotypical category. Once the traditional relationship has been established, the sighted employer does not have to worry about the "illicit" sources of power which the blind can bring to bear in an instrumental context. Essentially, the blind are forced into the dependent role by the sighted individual lowering or altering his expectations of performance, while at the same time offering the blind special rewards. In certain cases this might well be described as the seduction of the blind into their traditional role and in the extreme case, if the process has been successful, the blind and sighted are no longer in an instrumental relationship. A normative shift has occurred which is characterized principally by universalism giving way to particularism, and self-orientation being replaced by other-orientation. Affective or emotionally toned attitudes have been brought into play, and concern for performance has been overshadowed by the quality of blindness. Lastly, the specific relationship common to the instrumental context has been replaced by a diffuse or paternalistic relationship flooding all sectors of the blinded individual's life.

Should the blinded individual vigorously reject these manoeuvres to bring him into his traditional role, and the sighted executive hold fast to the stereotypical definition, the latter can bring certain mechanisms of social control into play.<sup>3</sup> It should be emphasized that from the stand-

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

point of the sighted person or administrator, the blinded individual's attempts to approach the norms of instrumental functioning are deviant actions which may be met and controlled in a manner thought to be in the best interests of the blind. The administrator can, for instance, offer conditional support, upholding the blind person only if he will retreat to his traditional role. He can also exhibit permissiveness toward the blind individual's actions and can deny him reciprocity by refusing to act out the relationship in terms of its instrumental norms. Finally, the sighted can manipulate sanctions and rewards by focusing solely on the reward system which is tied to the restricted or limited role of the blind. His actions have for him an aura of intrinsic rightness, since his behavior is grounded and legitimized in the general fund of social knowledge.

However, from the perspective of the blinded individual attempting to position himself in an instrumental relationship, these conventional responses of the sighted will crudely distort his definition of self and situation. In resisting these control pressures, the blinded individual will view the sighted person's actions as deviations from the modified instrumental relationship. Other actions may deviate not only from the modified instrumental relationship but from the norms of the larger society as well. It is crucial to specify some of the directions and intensities of deviance, for they often characterize the framework within which the active blind must strive to redefine the situation.<sup>4</sup>

One such deviant response may be that of categorical rejection as when the blind are treated as outcasts and excluded from all social intercourse. More commonly, however, the rejection is limited and tied in with other stereotypical responses. Perhaps chief among these is the rejection met by the blind in their efforts to break into the occupational world. For the blind, occupational disenfran-

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



chisement exceeds that of most other categories or minority groupings. When faced with total rejection the blind may counter by rejecting in turn those who place them outside the major currents of life. Weaker than rejection, yet still tending to isolate the blind, is the mechanism of withdrawal. While the physical isolation of the blind is notorious, they may be separated in social situations through simple avoidance of communication. One or more members of the company or firm may ignore them by not speaking or by using gestures which effectively exclude them from casual, interpersonal relationships. If the blinded individual recognizes these withdrawal tendencies, he may react with counter-avoidance and solidify his state of isolation.

Too great an emphasis on directing or guiding the blind, as in an office or while travelling, may constitute a form of dominance. The blind person often hears a steady stream of, "To your right! To your left! Stop!", and so on. He can rebel against this martinet-like treatment by going heedlessly on his way in areas that are familiar to him, or by disengaging himself from the situation. Another particularly disturbing mode of behavior involves a misdirection of empathy, or complete submission. The sighted individual so identifies with the blind that he becomes all but blind himself, tending to disfigure the relationship through the imposition of bizarre or unrealistic norms. More commonly, however, the blind are confronted with behavior that is apparently directed toward recognition of their unique and difficult role. Here the blinded individual's capabilities are patronized by a sighted person who pretends to treat him on the basis of instrumental norms and assigns him a role of full performance with one hand, while reducing his dignity and stature with the other. Thus, in an office the benevolent administrator might offer the blind person an important job and then undercut him by having his work covered or checked by another employee. His attitude is, "We want

him to go ahead and feel himself capable, but after all not much can be expected from the blind so we protect him and ourselves, of course, by supervising his activities more closely than we would those of a sighted worker." Such deceitful and hypocritical behavior constitutes a moral transgression which can only evoke intense aggression and resentment in the more active blind.

One of the least common varieties of deviance is direct cheating of the blind by taking advantage of their lack of sight. Cultural norms make deviance of this sort extremely unlikely. However, an example might be the act of appropriating the better clients in a blind salesman's files. Shortchanging or robbing are of course other alternatives. The blind person's reaction would be to mistrust people generally, to be at odds with the world. Deviance of this sort is naturally disruptive to social integration since the blind must, by the nature of their disability, operate under a pervasive assumption of trust. It would be chaotic for a blind individual to be forced to regard all others as potential enemies. This area of trust is a special case of Durkheim's noncontractual element in contract and, if violated often, would turn any interpersonal relationship into a mountainous difficulty.<sup>5</sup>

A further direction of deviance is evasion of responsibility and deviation may take place from either the norms of the modified instrumental relationship or the norms appropriate to the more traditional role. In either case, sighted persons have an obligation toward the blind which exceeds the usual norms. Failure to cope with the limitations of the blind might be one form of evasion, while another might be changing the flow of normal conversation when a blind person enters the group. The talk is structured so that contact with him on ambiguous topics is avoided. Con-

<sup>5</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, translated by George Simpson, Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1949.



versation about the weather is a favorite choice and the blind tend to become expert meteorologists. In reacting to this neutral atmosphere, the blind person then attempts to direct the conversational current back toward normal areas, but his statement is often overcolored or shocking, which may result in further evasive tendencies.

The norms of the traditional blind role may be compulsively enforced by the sighted. A co-worker, for instance, may overstress the restrictions of a blinded person's role by dialing a telephone number for him and then interceding in the call by initiating the conversation. This places the blind in the category of the totally disabled and distorts the succeeding communication by setting up a disfigured image. An equally compulsive tendency is seen in perfectionism of speech and other behavior through strict observation of the literal situation of the blind. A sighted administrator may ask, "Do you see?" referring to insight, then immediately make amends, saying, "Oh, I shouldn't have said that!" Overcorrectness and a focus on the range of limitation may also be seen in the question, "Did you hear the movie last night?" The blind individual may retort with some hastily devised, cutting remark, or merely mutter something to himself concerning "the well-meaning idiot."

The distinction between relating to individuals and to social norms has remained implicit in the foregoing material. Also implicit is the fact that the illustrations have incorporated theory or theories of the vicious circle, the same fundamental mechanism recognized by Merton as the self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>6</sup> Vicious circle phenomena are most apparent when relationships are shot through with aggression, for the actions of one tend to confirm the suspicions of the other, and this very confirmation has the effect of heightening still further the level of tension. Once set in motion, the

<sup>6</sup> Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Glencoe, Ill. The Free Press, 1949.

process is cumulative, and its final effects can be quite out of proportion to the severity of the original act.<sup>7</sup> The process will, of course, be shaped by the specific situation, tending to limit the intensity of the quarrel and restricting the kind of social weapons employed. Aggressive actions and reactions, for instance, are not commonly experienced by the blind. More often, they are caught up in a sequence of withdrawal and counter-withdrawal, which makes their isolation inevitable.

Vicious circle phenomena were set in motion in the present context by sketching a series of stereotyped or deviant acts which can be exhibited by the sighted in their social relationships. These diverse actions and orientations were then countered by the blind as they contributed marginal behavior of their own. The flow of action thereafter tends to spiral downward as each becomes progressively alienated from the other. Tensions increase and frustration or anxiety marks each new exchange. Progressively, the release of tension comes to have priority over other alternative paths of action, and both blind and sighted hew ever closer to their own definition of the situation. Each has made a lavish emotional investment, tending to polarize his actions and orientations.

In a setting laden with tension, the blinded individual may fall into the trap of employing aggressive techniques which are grounded in the stereotypical role. If he is to attain the modified instrumental relationship his aggressive behavior must be similar to that of the noninjured. For in using the special weapons of blindness, he only confirms the conventional definitions held in the larger society, and the self-fulfilling prophecy has come full circle.

For the most part, this chapter has been a brief summary of the over-all approach taken within this work. The con-

<sup>7</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, New York, Harper & Bros., 1944.



cern has been with the structure of relationships and the nature of the interactive process. The blind were analyzed against a backdrop of the larger society and explored in their relation to it, not considered as isolated phenomena. Thus the contact of blind and sighted was examined not merely to describe one or the other, but to probe the complex social reality of which they are both a part. At every stage we have, in fact, found it impossible to speak of the blind without reference to the social mold in which their lives have been cast. The search has been for patterned uniformities in the process of action and reaction. Not only is the discussion indebted to the literature of blindness, but it has been advanced through comparative analysis of other disabled and minority groupings. The work has been largely exploratory and its chief contribution may be in building a frame for a more searching analysis.





## APPENDIX I

### The Blind in Context: A Brief History

*"The history of the blind represents one of the sorriest records of man's inability to understand himself."\**

The chronicles of Herodotus, some 500 years prior to Christ's birth make reference to the great numbers of blind within Egypt, the land that Hesiod termed "the country of the blind." As beggars, the blind roamed the streets and market places seeking alms. Their lot was much the same in both Sparta and Athens. Unlike the custom in Egypt, however, destruction of those born malformed or imperfect was sanctioned in the legal codes; in Sparta, under the laws of Lycurgus, and in Athens, under the laws of Solon. Ethical approval of this practice was given by both Plato and Aristotle. Romulus placed a restriction on this patriarchal right in Roman law by requiring the consent of five neighbors prior to the child's destruction. Some centuries later, Seneca writes dramatically of the wretched conditions which the blind of Rome were forced to endure.

The blind among the early Hebrews played their customary role as beggars. In Rabbinical literature there is the oft-recurring phrase, "The blind man is as one dead." By command of the Talmud, one must give the same benediction to the blind as that given on the death of a near relative. While there is some evidence that a few blind individuals were engaged in occupations as diverse as prostitution, rowing, scholarship, prophecy and handmill grinding, the overwhelming historical consensus clearly indicates that the blind eked out a mean and isolated existence throughout these early centuries.

Japan in the 9th century A.D. offers some contrast to the

\* Hector Chevigny and Sydell Braverman, *The Adjustment of the Blind*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950, p. 72.

general pattern. The blind of this era monopolized certain skills: massage, shampooing, chanting and the treatment of illness through counterirritants. Associations were formed having the structure and function of guilds, giving to the blind individual a formal social and occupational niche. India, China, and Korea, however, roughly follow the same broad outlines as were seen earlier in the societies of the West and near East. The teaching of Buddha offers one important variation, however. Basic to Buddhist philosophy was the extension of mercy to the weak and deformed which we can assume somewhat leavened the lot of the blind. Throughout the ages and in most cultures the blind have emerged in the role of soothsayers, tutors, and carriers of oral tradition. In Israel some blind committed large masses of data to memory, thus gaining the designation "baskets-of-books," while in India they were sometimes referred to as "living libraries." Then, too, diverse cultures have endowed some blind with prophetic vision of the future in exchange for the view of immediate physical space.

It must be re-emphasized, however, that the great mass of the blind were not part of these societies but labelled segments within them, surviving only as mendicants. The occupational or accepted social roles presented earlier were played only by the most exceptional blind and instances of the blind, individually or as a class, engaged in productive employment are extremely rare throughout most of man's history.

Western civilization, following the advent of Christianity, is marked by a gradually increasing number of hospices and cloisters for the unfortunate in which many blind were sheltered. Jesus' concern for the blind, it may be assumed, had an effect throughout Christendom.

State or public care of the blind began in France in the 13th Century where grouping of the blind in quasi-guilds or blind brotherhoods was fostered. Soon to be sanctioned by religious approval, legal privilege and the customs of feudalism, the brotherhoods had a determining effect upon the relationship between society and the blind. They cast the die of isolation and segregation, while gathering about mendicancy a cloak of



religious acceptance and pointing up the idleness to which the blind had long been condemned.

Care of the blind has been characterized throughout most of the middle ages by its close linkage with the church. Special rights and indulgences were given to the blind and the period has been termed the "golden era" of beggary. Paralleling the rise of towns and cities, there was a vast increment in the number of mendicants that preyed upon the concentrated and settled populations in search of alms. In England, following the wars of Henry VII and throughout the reign of Henry VIII, swarms of beggars reached such proportions that a shift in attitudes took place, investing the blind beggar with an aura of evil and rascality. The "poor laws" of Queen Elizabeth reflect the magnitude of the existing social problem.

Mid-18th century philosophy exemplified in Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau marks the next important era in the history of the blind. Diderot's "Lettre sur les aveugles a l'usage de ceux que voient" was written in the year 1749. The humanitarian epoch instituted drastic changes in the status of the blind. Liberty, equality and the innate dignity of the individual soon filtered down through society, incorporating various handicapped or disadvantaged groupings. The remnants of a feudal system had been overthrown and the blind, like others, soon demanded a new and more rewarding status. Changed societies, particularly France and America, offered the blind for the first time an opportunity for full and complete integration.

In 1785, the National Institute for the Young Blind was founded in Paris, marking the beginning of organized education for the blind and with it, the beginning of the asylum period in its secular form. Formal education of the blind in America stems from these French origins. The 19th century was witness to two conflicting forces which played upon the blind. Humanitarianism expressed itself through a vast increase in organized charities, and Darwinian thinking brought forth discussion of eugenics. In the first half of the 20th century the blind of the United States have been recipients of extensive

public assistance in terms of monetary compensation and legislation oriented toward vocational rehabilitation. Increased access to various forms of public education has also marked this era.

While an accurate enumeration of the blind in the United States does not exist, a widely accepted estimate is 333,000 and of these, probably half are above 65 years of age. It should be emphasized that factors of sex, education, social class and occupation all cut across the category bearing the blind label. Still other discrete segments would include the war blind. Following World War II the armed forces contributed roughly 1900 individuals to the larger category of the blind, and through the drama of their loss they have awakened interest in the distressing dilemma that has followed the blind down through the ages.

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## APPENDIX II

### The Questionnaire

You have been selected to answer a series of questions about physically handicapped individuals. We realize that many of you have never had the opportunity to associate with severely handicapped persons and, therefore, know very little about them. Our purpose in asking the questions, however, is *not to test the amount of information* you have on this subject, but to find out what you think and feel about the handicapped. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions that follow. The best answer, and the one which will be most helpful is your own personal opinion. You can contribute a great deal to this study by:

- A) Reading each statement carefully and marking it according to your first reaction. It is not necessary to take a lot of time for any one question.
- B) Answering every question in the order presented. Please do not look ahead.
- C) Being as sincere, accurate, and complete as possible.

#### I

Check whether you are male or female:

Male\_\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_\_

#### II

A. Which of the following do you feel is the worst injury that could happen to you? Place a number 1 beside the injury that would be most difficult to face, a number 2 beside the next most difficult to face, and so on through 5, which will be for you the easiest injury to face.

- \_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in the amputation of one arm.
- \_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in blindness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in severe burns of the face.



\_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in the amputation of one leg.

\_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in deafness.

- B. Which of the following is the worst injury that could happen to a person you would like to marry? Place a number 1 beside the injury which would be the most difficult to accept in the person you wanted to marry, a number 2 beside the next most difficult, and so on through 5, which would be for you the easiest injury to accept in the person you have chosen to marry.

\_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in the amputation of one arm.

\_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in blindness.

\_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in severe burns of the face.

\_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in the amputation of one leg.

\_\_\_\_\_ An injury resulting in deafness.

### III

If you were placed in the following situations with a blind acquaintance of *your own* sex, what do you think might be the best answer in each case? Check only one answer for each of the following situations. If you are a boy, please remember that *your acquaintance* will be a boy; and if you are a girl, *your acquaintance* will be a girl.

1. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would avoid talking about colors, paintings, and sunsets as much as possible?  
\_\_\_\_\_ would avoid talking about them.  
\_\_\_\_\_ would not avoid talking about them.  
\_\_\_\_\_ don't know.
2. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think it would be all right as a general rule to use the word blind in your conversation?  
\_\_\_\_\_ would use blind.  
\_\_\_\_\_ would not use blind.  
\_\_\_\_\_ don't know.
3. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would insist upon giving up your seat if there were no other seats available on the bus?

\_\_\_\_\_ would give up my seat.  
\_\_\_\_\_ would not give up my seat.  
\_\_\_\_\_ don't know.

4. If you were on friendly terms with a blind acquaintance who was wearing a pair of socks which did not match, do you think you would tell your acquaintance about it?

\_\_\_\_\_ would tell.  
\_\_\_\_\_ would not tell.  
\_\_\_\_\_ don't know.

5. If your blind acquaintance invited you for an ice cream soda, do you think, as a general rule, you would pay for them even though your acquaintance insisted upon treating you?

\_\_\_\_\_ would pay for them.  
\_\_\_\_\_ would let acquaintance pay for them.  
\_\_\_\_\_ don't know.

6. If you were to take your blind acquaintance to the cafeteria of your school, do you think everyone would feel that your acquaintance should go to the head of the lunch line rather than to the end, if they knew that your acquaintance were blind?

\_\_\_\_\_ to the head of the line.  
\_\_\_\_\_ to the end of the line.  
\_\_\_\_\_ don't know.

7. If you introduced your blind acquaintance to your friends, do you think they would feel uneasy in the situation?

\_\_\_\_\_ would feel uneasy.  
\_\_\_\_\_ would not feel uneasy.  
\_\_\_\_\_ don't know.

8. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think you would expect your acquaintance to be just about like everybody else after you really got to know your acquaintance?

\_\_\_\_\_ like everybody else.  
\_\_\_\_\_ not like everybody else.  
\_\_\_\_\_ don't know.



9. If you had a blind acquaintance who was a well known member of an organization to which you belonged, do you think, as a general rule, that your acquaintance would be nominated for important offices that involved leadership?
- \_\_\_\_\_ would be nominated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ would not be nominated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ don't know.
10. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would expect to take all the blame from the druggist, if you and your acquaintance, whom the druggist knew to be blind, were caught making a lot of racket in the drug store?
- \_\_\_\_\_ would expect all the blame.
- \_\_\_\_\_ would not expect all the blame.
- \_\_\_\_\_ don't know.
11. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would avoid talking about dates and dating when your acquaintance was present?
- \_\_\_\_\_ would avoid talking about them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ would not avoid talking about them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ don't know.
12. If you had a blind acquaintance, do you think, as a general rule, you would have your acquaintance take hold of your arm while walking downstairs, or do you think you would take hold of your acquaintance's arm?
- \_\_\_\_\_ would have acquaintance take hold of my arm.
- \_\_\_\_\_ would take hold of arm of my acquaintance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ don't know.

## IV

Following are a series of statements with which you may generally agree or disagree. Show your agreement or disagreement with each statement by placing a check on one of the two lines provided. There are no correct or incorrect answers

to these statements. However, it is important that we know how you feel about them.

1. The blind, in general, can do just about everything with very little help. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
2. The blind, in general, are conscious of the fact that blindness has a disturbing effect on some other people. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
3. The blind, in general, do not feel themselves to be inferior to most other people. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
4. In general, the blind prefer being alone much of the time. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
5. The blind, in general, can hear fainter sounds than most other people. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
6. The blind, in general, are capable of being meaner than most other people. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
7. The blind, in general, never seem to fully grow up. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
8. The blind, in general, like other people, do not have a sixth sense. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
9. The blind, in general, have a whole set of feelings which cannot be understood by most other people. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
10. The blind, in general, seem to have a special spiritual quality. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
11. The blind, in general, get a more accurate first impres-



- sion of others than most people do. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
12. The blind, in general, would probably be unhappy if they had a separate community of their own. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
13. In general, blind people have no objections to talking about their blindness. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
14. In general, the blind should have to work and support themselves as other people do. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
15. The blind, in general, care less about their personal appearance than other people do. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
16. The blind, in general, are somehow given at least one really outstanding gift like musical talent as compensation. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
17. The blind, in general, spend very little time wishing they could see. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
18. The blind, in general, are more cheerful than most other people. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
19. In general, the blind seem to fall into two separate groups: either they can't do much of anything, or they do almost everything surprisingly well. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
20. In general, the blind are more irritable than most other people. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree

21. The blind, in general, prefer other blind people for friends. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
22. I think some blind people are blind because they are being punished for something they have done. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
23. I think I would prepare myself to meet a really different sort of person, if I were told I was soon going to meet someone who was blind. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
24. I think that if I were blinded, I could make a pretty good adjustment to being blind. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
25. I think that most little children would not feel there is anything frightening about a blind person. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
26. I think if the blind are concerned only with their personal problems, and not those of others, it should be overlooked because of their blindness. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
27. I think most people would not watch a blind person if one walked down the street. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
28. I think if I were blinded I could make as many real friends as I do now. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
29. I think I would rather be dead than be blind. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
30. I think that if I met a blind person, I could carry on a conversation quite easily. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree



31. I think when you come right down to it, almost everything a blind person can do is amazing. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
32. I think if the blind become angry with people over little things, it should be overlooked because of their blindness. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
33. I think, if I had to guess, I would say that there are many more blind men than women. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
34. I think the blind, more than most people, have to put up a front, and act as though they are enjoying everything even when they are quite unhappy. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
35. I think most people just don't know how the blind manage many of the things they do. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
36. I think you must have to make an awful lot of exceptions for even successful blind people. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
37. I think I would just as soon avoid blind people, if it could be done without hurting anyone's feelings. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
38. I think most people would feel there is nothing repugnant about the blind. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
39. I think most people feel generally superior to the blind. \_\_\_\_\_agree \_\_\_\_\_disagree
40. I think that if blind people are demanding of others, it

- should be overlooked because of their blindness.      \_\_\_\_\_agree      \_\_\_\_\_disagree
41. I think the blind are more like other people in general than they are like each other.      \_\_\_\_\_agree      \_\_\_\_\_disagree
42. I think you must have to do a lot of play-acting when you are around the blind to make them feel that they are normal.      \_\_\_\_\_agree      \_\_\_\_\_disagree
43. I think that in talking with blind persons, I would feel self-conscious when I realized that they did not know what I looked like.      \_\_\_\_\_agree      \_\_\_\_\_disagree
44. I think the blind live in a world of their own.      \_\_\_\_\_agree      \_\_\_\_\_disagree
45. I think somebody who knows something about the blind, and can see, should be with them most of the time.      \_\_\_\_\_agree      \_\_\_\_\_disagree
46. I think if the blind are often late for appointments it should be overlooked because of their blindness.      \_\_\_\_\_agree      \_\_\_\_\_disagree

Thank you for your cooperation. Without changing any of your answers, turn in the questionnaire according to the instructions given you by your teacher.



# The Interview Guide

## THE SOCIAL OR ATTITUDINAL SETTING

- A. What are some of the more common attitudes that sighted individuals have about the blind?
- B. When travelling how do others react to you as a blind person?
- C. Just what do you think comes into a person's mind when he first sees a blind man?
- D. What would an employer think about a blind individual?
- E. What about your friends? Do you think they fully understand you as a blind person?
- F. What do you think sighted individuals should consider in their relationships with the blind?
- G. If you had to summarize all the attitudes and ideas about the blind, how would you go about it?

## STATUS IMPLICATIONS AND THE DIMENSION ACCEPTANCE—REJECTION

- A. When you first meet someone, do they usually accept you as just another individual?
- B. Do you think blindness makes much of a difference as to how people go about treating you? In what ways?
- C. Do you think anyone would avoid you just because you are blind?
- D. Do you think anyone would go out of their way to meet you because of your blindness?
- E. Do you think anyone looks down on a blind individual or thinks of him as inferior?
- F. What about pity? Respect? Condescension?

## OVERSUPPORT AND OVERPERMISSIVENESS

- A. Is it possible to really take advantage of your blindness and put a lot over on other people.

- B. Do you think people make too many or too few exceptions for you as a blind person? How do you react?
- C. Do you think people overpraise or underpraise those things that you can do?
- D. Are most people overhelpful or underhelpful? Do they know how to go about helping you?
- E. Do people react differently to you now than they did while you were in uniform?

#### SITUATION DEFINED

- A. What do you feel one misses most by being unable to see?
- B. What was the hardest thing to make an adjustment to after the injury?
- C. In what kind of situation have you been most aware of your handicap?
- D. What are the stages one has to go through after being blinded?
- E. If you could change the attitudes of society toward the blind, which attitudes would you change?

## APPENDIX III

### Selected Bibliography

While the following constitutes a major fraction of the material having a direct impact upon the work, the bibliography is selected in the sense that a whole mass of literature unrepresented here was carefully examined. This material has undoubtedly had a subtle or covert influence, shaping the volume in a variety of ways. It might also be observed that many of the references below will be most easily obtained in the American Foundation for the Blind Library, 15 West 16th Street, New York, or the library of Perkins School for the Blind, Watertown, Massachusetts.

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